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THE BATTERED WOMAN EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING THE LIVES OF LATINA WOMEN AND THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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THE BATTERED WOMAN EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY EXPLORING THE LIVES OF LATINA WOMEN AND THEIR
EXPERIENCE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

By

Jaime Gonzalez

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Under the Supervision of Michael J. Scheel

Lincoln, Nebraska

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THE BATTERED WOMAN EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
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Jaime Gonzalez, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2010

Advisor: Michael J. Scheel

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the meanings that Latina women place on their domestic violence experiences so as to better understand what impact these meanings may or may not have on their futures and the futures of their families. This study used qualitative interviews and the method of phenomenology to elicit descriptions from a sample of Latina victims of domestic violence. Specifically, the goal of this study was to explore how Latinas conceptualize their experience of domestic violence and to understand how these conceptualizations differ from those used to describe domestic violence from a Euro-American women's perspective. Participants were recruited from a local Midwestern agency that provides crisis intervention, advocacy and prevention services for domestic violence, incest and sexual assault victims. The aim of this project was to recruit at least 10 participants. This decision was influenced by Creswell's recommendation that a phenomenological study requires at least 10 participants in order to make assertions regarding the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2006). The method of data collection was through interview. Participants were monetarily compensated for their time and effort. The timeframe for data collection was approximately six months.

The interviews took place at the agency described above and were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Participants were involved in member-checking to assure that the appropriate meanings and interpretations of data were accurate. The meaning of the participant's experience is meant to provide implications for the understanding of domestic violence in Latina culture and will provide information toward the development of a culturally sensitive model of domestic violence.

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I dedicate this work to you, my mother Ramona Gonzalez; it is your love that has carried me through the ups and downs of life and your memory that inspires me to make a difference for those women who currently suffer, as you once did. I know that you are looking down on me from heaven above and that you would be the first to congratulate me if you were here today. I love you and miss you very much!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Battered Woman Experience: A Phenomenological Study Exploring The Lives of Latina Women and their Experience with Domestic Violence

Problem/Purpose Statement

This qualitative study used phenomenological interviews to explore the meanings that Latina women place on their experience of domestic violence. The phenomenon of domestic violence was studied within a cultural and ethnic context in order to better understand the meanings placed on this phenomenon by Latina women. Additionally, the influence of culture and ethnicity on these meanings was explored.

Domestic violence has a long research history. Through this extensive history, academicians have developed theories that attempt to explain this phenomenon (e.g., Walker, 1979; Barnes, 1999; Beven, 2002; Dutton, 2000; Gerbert, 1996), yet, none has developed a theory that integrates the victim's culture, ethnicity, and familial background to help explain the experience of domestic violence. A strong need exists for such a theory; a culturally sensitive theory of domestic violence; one that takes the first hand perspective of the victim and tries to understand and explain the phenomenon through a cultural and ethnic context. It is clear that one's culture certainly helps in defining the meanings that one gives to various experiences in life; however, what is not known is what role culture and ethnicity have in the development of the meanings that one gives to being a victim of this phenomenon.

Definitional Considerations

The term domestic violence is used throughout this study despite the fact that interpersonal violence (IPV) is a more commonly used term in the literature (Dutton, 2002). The reason is one of personal preference rather than one of differential meaning. Specifically, because this study's focus is on the experience of women victims of male inflicted abuse, interpersonal violence does not seem to appropriately fit the study. Additionally, for the purpose of this study, the investigator is defining domestic violence as any violent confrontation between family intimate partners and/or spouses involving physical harm, sexual assault, or fear of physical harm. Typically, domestic violence refers to violence between spouses; however, for the purpose of this study the term domestic violence will also apply to those involved in heterosexual dating relationships, cohabitating relationships and to those who may have a biological and/or legal parent-child relationship.

Examples of domestic violence include but are not limited to the use of the following; hitting, slapping, punching, biting, hair pulling, pushing, shaking, choking, kicking, pinching, confining, forced intercourse (or any type of unwanted sexual touching), and depriving of food, water and/or sleep (Gelles, 1997; Denzin, 1984). Again, these are only some examples of domestic violence and others may certainly exist.

Background

To fully understand domestic violence in our society, one must review some historical points. Throughout the 1800's U.S. state laws and cultural practices supported a man's right to chastise and discipline his wife with any instrument he felt necessary (Gelles, 1997). In fact, it wasn't even until 1895 that women were granted the right to

divorce their husbands on grounds of abuse. However, serious attention to domestic violence only began in the 1970's with the launch of the Women's Movement (Gelles, 1997). Since then several efforts have been made to better understand domestic violence; however, efforts have been slow moving and are often very costly. One example of acknowledging domestic violence as a world-wide concern was when, in 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women concluded that civil society and governments have acknowledged that violence against women is a public health and human rights concern. (Pan-American Health Organization, 2003) Due to their conclusion, work in this area has resulted in the establishment of international standards for protecting the rights of women; however, due to the sheer magnitude of the problem, domestic violence continues to be a phenomenon that is difficult to measure and produce data that will help guide future policy. In response to this difficulty, the World Health Organization (WHO) designed a multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence (WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women, 2005). Researchers interviewed 10,000 women across ten countries; among the study's vast amount of findings, the organization concluded that domestic violence against women is strikingly common; specifically, results indicate that over half of the women interviewed across 9 of the 10 countries had been subjected to some form of abuse prior to the age of 15. More importantly, the organization concluded that the amount of domestic violence significantly differed across countries. Women living in cities versus rural areas reported higher rates of domestic violence. Additionally, findings also indicate that an association exists between the amount of domestic violence experienced and women's beliefs that

such violence is normal in an intimate relationship (WHO, 2005). Although the World Health Organization's study produced important findings, it did not investigate Latinas and did not explore the influence of culture and ethnicity on the meanings that women place on their abusive experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill the gap that remains in studying Latina culture and its influence on the meanings that the Latina victims of domestic violence in this study place on their abusive experiences.

Despite the many efforts to reduce violence against women, domestic violence continues to be a serious problem in the United States. This year alone, it is projected that three to four million women will be threatened by domestic violence. (Russo, Koss, & Goodman, 1995). Additionally, domestic violence does not discriminate. Women of all ethnicities are equally susceptible to becoming victims of domestic violence (Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *1993-2001*). Moreover, the U.S. Department of Justice (1998) estimates that women are 5-8 times more likely to become victims of domestic violence than are men and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001) estimates that women between the ages of 18 and 24 are at highest risk for experiencing violence in their intimate relationships. This means that our daughters, sisters, nieces, granddaughters, etc., are at the highest risk for experiencing domestic violence during the beginnings of their independent lives. For most, leaving home for the first time is a rite of passage, a celebration into adulthood and independence, not one that should be considered as being the most dangerous time for women.

As if this were not enough, the economical impact that domestic violence has on our society is also astounding. The monetary impact that domestic violence has on our

society runs into the billions of dollars each year (Center for Disease Control, 2006). For instance, each year two-hundred thousand emergency visits are accounted for by domestic violence and these visits total a cost of 4.1 billion dollars each and every year. These costs are not limited to medical emergencies, but also to mental health emergencies (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). Moreover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimates that domestic violence claims the lives of 4 women each and every day in the U.S. On average, this accounts for more than 30 percent of all murders committed in the U.S. and millions of dollars spent throughout the justice system each and every year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).

Domestic Violence and Increasing Diversification

People of color have reached a critical mass in the United States, and the numbers are expected to increase (Lum, 2004). From 1990 to 2000, the United States population grew roughly 13 percent. Today, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates the U.S. population to be 281 million. Moreover, this mass increase is largely due to the influx of racial/ethnic minority groups. Specifically, the Latino population accounts for 58 percent of this increase (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001) and people of color account for roughly 30 percent of the entire U.S. population. This rapid increase is largely due to two major factors: 1) current immigration rates and 2) differential birth rates. The first has been an issue of heated debate amongst scholars and the lay-person alike, and has been a hot topic in most news media stories today. What we do know is that immigration rates today are the largest in U.S. history (Sue, 2006). The issue of birthrate illuminates the fact that Euro-American births have declined to a staggering low of 1.7 per woman, while

that of the minority population has increased (Sue, 2006). Due to the reality of this diversification, a need exists to explore the unique perspectives and conceptualizations that ethnic minorities have of domestic violence and how it influences, not only their lives but the lives of future generations.

Theoretical Base/Current Theories of Domestic Violence and Their Limitations

The dynamics of violent couples and psychological characteristics of both victims and perpetrators have been explained from many theoretical perspectives, including but not limited to social learning, psychoanalysis, family systems and feminist theories (Flores-Ortiz, 1993). Although these perspectives differ in their explanation of domestic violence, they all agree on their description of the domestic violence victim. These theories describe domestic violence victims as individuals who lack self-esteem, demonstrate high tolerances to frustration, a long history of suffering, an outward expression of psychosomatic symptoms and high to moderate levels of depression and stress disorders (Flores-Ortiz, 1993). Regardless of their level of harmony, these theories all fall short simply because they fail to take into consideration the cultural aspects of domestic violence and how these differ within each person's culture. Furthermore, in their attempt to explain domestic violence victims, they make the inexcusable mistake of blaming the victim for their experience with domestic violence and ultimately describe these victims as masochistic and martyr-like individuals (Leupnitz, 1998).

Attempting to develop a theory that explains domestic violence in Latino/a culture, Flores-Ortiz (2000) explains that domestic violence is rooted in the interpersonal injustice within the family and overarching society which are located within the legacy of

oppression and colonization of the United States (Flores-Ortiz, 2000). These authors explain that the U.S. caste system provides the building blocks for a pyramid of oppression based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and education. Moreover, it was this type of caste system that had an influence on Latino men to become violent toward their intimate partners. Diaz-Guerrero (1954) explains the conquest and colonization of Mexico as creating a complex in Mexican men that made them feel existentially raped, causing them to overcompensate with feelings of exaggerated bravado and machismo, and in turn becoming violent toward their intimate partners. Although their theory helps explain the origins and roots of domestic violence in Latin culture, it does nothing to explain domestic violence from the victim's perspective. In fact, most theories of domestic violence do just that; they attempt to explain why domestic violence occurs; they do not, however, explain how or why culture influences a women's perspective on the actual abuse. Although not yet empirically examined, clinical data suggest that women who feel oppressed by the larger society and who hold rigid sex role views are more likely to become victims of domestic violence (Flores-Ortiz et al., 1994).

Significance of the Study

The majority of domestic violence research has been conducted from a quantitative perspective (Dunbar & Jeannechild, 1996; Okun, 1998). This is largely due to the difficulty inherent in conducting qualitative research with a population that has experienced traumatic events (e.g., domestic violence). Moreover, some of the methods used in collecting qualitative data (i.e., in-depth interviews) involve getting to know

participants at much deeper and meaningful levels than those used to collect quantitative data. This fact alone influences the challenge of conducting a qualitative study in domestic violence and makes conducting a quantitative study much more appealing to the average researcher. Because qualitative studies involve research questions that attempt to explore the essence of a participant's lived experience, qualitative studies typically lend themselves to a much richer and greater understanding of the phenomenon explored (Okum, 1998).

Previous research has primarily focused on the psychological well-being of domestic violence victims and the overall impact it has on economic resources (e.g., Loxten, et al., 2006; Ham-Rowbottom, et al., 2005; Testa, et al., 2001). Given the economic strains, the burden it plays on victims and families, and the overall stressors it places on society, why has domestic violence not been fully explored from a qualitative perspective? Some have said that barriers unique to domestic violence victims exist that prevent researchers from conducting good qualitative research with this population (Shaw, 2005). What barriers or issues exist that make this type of research difficult to conduct? According to Shaw (2005), the challenges involve issues of locating participants, working through participant's beliefs and emotions about research, and issues of fear, shame, helplessness, and hopelessness. These are only some of the issues that make it challenging for researchers to conduct qualitative research with this population. Regardless of the challenges, it is imperative that qualitative research be conducted because a great deal about domestic violence has yet to be fully understood. Qualitative research in this area will provide a richness of information that has the

potential of guiding future research in this area and may also lend itself to the development of a new, culturally sensitive, theory of domestic violence.

At the clinical level, it is not quite understood what role culture plays in influencing the meanings placed on the experience of domestic violence for Latina women. However, a better understanding of the experience of domestic violence from a Latina's point of view will easily lend to future developments of culturally sensitive treatment protocols because it will take into account the complexities involved in being a Latina woman, in the United States, who is a victim of domestic violence. Because counseling Latina women that are victims of domestic violence is complex and multidimensional (Velasquez, 2004), a need exists to better understand the phenomenon of domestic violence and specifically to better understand the phenomenon of domestic violence in the Latina population.

Findings from this study are intended to help bridge both the gap that exists in our understanding of domestic violence from a phenomenological perspective, and our clinical practices in treating Latina victims of domestic violence. Since, according to the Center for Disease Control (2005), domestic violence continues to be a problem of epidemic proportions, it is imperative that research expand our understanding of this phenomenon and new practices are developed that are guided by research and culturally geared toward specific ethnic groups.

Philosophical Foundations

The tradition of inquiry in this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology is the scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them in our

consciousness, and does not concern itself with matters of fact but seeks to uncover meanings of the phenomena being studied. Phenomenology describes the meaning of lived experiences for individuals experiencing a particular phenomena or concept (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology is particularly suited for this study because it is the meanings of participant's experience that enhance the study of the phenomenon.

Specifically, it is the meaning that each Latina woman victim of domestic violence places on her experience that will expand the knowledge of the phenomenon and allow researchers and clinicians alike to better comprehend the concept of domestic violence in the Latina population. With the goal of better understanding what it is like for the Latina women in this study to experience domestic violence in the U.S., and what it means to be a Latina victim of domestic violence, the research questions for this study were designed to encourage participants to share their own personal experiences with domestic violence and the meanings that each of them has given to being a victim of domestic violence. Lastly, the descriptions and meanings that each participant gives regarding her experience with domestic violence will make up a thematic structure that will be used to identify common patterns between each participant and will ultimately define what meanings Latina women place on their domestic violence experience.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed:

- (1) How do the Latina women participating in this study interpret their domestic violence experiences?
- (2) How does culture influence the meanings that participants of this study place on their experience with domestic violence?

- (3) How do the findings from the lived experiences of the women of this study compare to previous findings from research with Latina domestic violence victims?
- (4) What implications do the meanings of the lived experience of the domestic violence victims in this study present for the treatment of domestic violence for Latina women in the U.S.?

Epoche “My Experience with Domestic Violence”

Prior to undertaking the enormous task of capturing the essence of domestic violence in Latina women, I engaged in the process called Epoche. This is a process in which I set aside any prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas about domestic violence. This process involves something called “bracketing.” Bracketing is what is done with the focus of the research study and everything else (e.g., prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas) is set aside so as to assure that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question at hand. The goal of the Epoche is to provide the author with a clearing of the mind, an awareness of his own biases, and their influence on his viewpoint of domestic violence. For both the reader and author, the Epoche provides an original vantage point to guide their understanding of the material offered by the participants of this study. In order for me and the readers of this piece to be fully aware of my biases, I will engage in this process by taking you on a short journey of my life, as it relates to the overall topic of domestic violence.

Born in 1969, I was not the product of a healthy and uncomplicated pregnancy and birth. I was born with Spina Bifida, a congenital birth defect that typically claims the lives of most of its victims. At birth I underwent surgery to repair the damaged nerves that protruded out of my lower back. Doctors told my mother and father that I would

never walk and that brain damage would likely be inevitable. I spent the first year of my life at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles; however, through countless more surgeries and the relentless efforts of my mother to have me walk, I went home and would soon be coined a miracle child because I could walk.

Growing up in a typical middle-class neighborhood in a suburb of Los Angeles, California, a typical day in our household involved my mother tending to my two older brothers and sister in addition to me, a child who had special physical needs. My father owned his own conveyer-belt repair business which typically had him away from home. However on the days that he was home, I remember lots of chaos. There were many days of yelling and screaming, use of fetid language, and lots of days of degrading behavior toward my mother. Every day was a day that I lived in fear of my father. You see, my father was not the type of man that a son could openly talk to or express any emotion toward (other than fear-filled respect).

Although days like those I describe were typical, it wasn't until I was about eight years old that I became aware of the possibility that he was physically abusing my mother. I remember one day, my mother having bruises on her face and watching her attempt to conceal them and listening to her tell those who would inquire about them that she bumped into a wall. In fact, we were all aware that my father slept with a hatchet under his pillow and that he would often verbally threaten to kill my mother. Although very peculiar, my mother never left my father. My oldest brother would often suggest that she leave him to which she would reply that my father would die without her. How ironic

that one day the opposite would occur. In the meantime, these episodes of abuse became much more frequent and violent.

However, it was when I was around 9 years old that the beginning stages of a murderous plot would occur. At about this time, my mother and I left the Catholic religion and became Seventh Day Adventist. Although my father had left the Catholic religion long before this, it enraged him that my mother would do such a thing. Regardless of his opposition, my mother's love for God was steadfast and we would attend church every Saturday. We would attend with neighbors that introduced my mother to this new religion. It was my mother's love for God that helped her endure my father's rage every Saturday morning. It wasn't more than a year later that my father decided it was time to retire and move us all to Guadalajara, Mexico. My two older brothers would not be joining us since they had families of their own; however, my older sister (still a year shy of becoming an adult) would have no choice in the matter. Before long, my father sold his business and our home and purchased a new home in Guadalajara.

Living in Mexico was quite challenging for me. Attending a new school and making new friends was extremely challenging because I did not fluently speak the Spanish language. I was the laughing stock of the school and would often be called "pocho," a Spanish term used to describe a Hispanic who does not speak the Spanish language. Regardless of the language barriers, I attended a Spanish-speaking Seventh Day Adventist church that my mother managed to find shortly after arriving. Again this enraged my father. My suspicion is that his plan to retire and move to Mexico was driven

by his obsession to control my mother rather than a genuine desire to enjoy retirement in the country where he and my mother were born.

Oddly enough, the violent episodes continued and worsened. My father would often threaten to not only kill my mother but also her sisters who now lived only a couple of miles away. He began to make accusations of the adulteress type, often accusing my mother of not attending church but rather having an affair and taking me along with her to watch. Apparently, his loss of control began to have an effect on his ability to reason and remain cognizant of reality. Although things remained this way for some time, a year later my sister (now an adult) would make the decision to return to the U.S. and begin her own independent life. However, this meant that it was now just my mother and I alone with my father whom I had grown increasingly fearful of.

Another year would pass until that horrible day that would forcibly launch me from adolescence to adulthood. That morning, July 6, 1981, would start with an argument between my mother and father because she and I were going to church. The argument got so bad that my mother sent me to church with friends while she stayed home to contend with him. I, uneventfully, attended church and was on my way back home when the people I had gone with decided that they needed to run errands prior to returning me home. It would be approximately two hours later that I would return home. Upon arriving, I could see my father through the open front door sitting in his living room chair. It was at that moment that he arose from his chair and came at me with the force of a grown man attacking another. He proceeded to physically attack me, using closed-fists and kicks, he left me bloody, bruised and in fear for my life. As the beating was taking

place, he was yelling at me and telling me that my mother was out in the streets looking for me. I managed to escape his grasp and ran upstairs to one of the bedrooms where I hid and awaited my mother's return.

Approximately one hour would pass before I heard my mother, her sister and my cousin pulled into the driveway. I managed to make my way out to the balcony where my mother saw me covered in blood. She ran toward the front door but my father slammed it closed and locked it. The next thing I knew was that my father was standing right in front of me with a shotgun in his hand and telling me to stay in the bedroom, while he walked out into the hallway. At this time, my mother managed to unlock the front door downstairs and made her way to where I was. To this day, I do not know how she managed to get passed my father but she did and was now consoling me while my father argued with her sister (my aunt). As my father continued to argue with my aunt, my mother and I made our way to her bedroom where she told me to stay. As I pleaded for her to stay with me, she exited the bedroom and closed the door behind her; however, I followed right behind. As I opened the door, I saw her to my right putting down her purse on a desk that was at the entrance of another bedroom and I also saw my father standing to my right and aiming the shotgun at her. The next thing I remember was hearing a very loud blast, smelling the overwhelming stench of fired gunpowder and watching my father run down the stairs and out the front door. I ran to the balcony and screamed for help, went back to my mother, who was lying on the floor bleeding from a very large hole that covered the entire side of her right cheek, and helplessly held her in my arms and watched her die. Later that night my father would be captured; however, he would later

manage to illegally manipulate his way around a 15 year sentence and only saw the inside of a jail cell for 2 years.

Later it would become known that my mother was planning on leaving the abusive relationship and in her purse had two plane tickets for the U.S. It has been twenty-seven years since that day, and needless to say, my life changed dramatically. I returned to the U.S. and would live under the care of my oldest brother and his family. Without going into further detail, fifteen years later I managed to forgive my father for his murderous actions and moved on with my life. I now wholeheartedly believe that if my mother had left him sooner she would still be alive today.

How have my personal values, beliefs and worldview been affected by my experience with domestic violence? I would have to say that my values and beliefs, associated to my Latino heritage (i.e., familismo, machismo and marianismo), as well as my religious values (e.g., believing that the Virgin Mary is to be modeled by all Latina women) and the belief that women are inherently supposed to suffer more than men, have been challenged and destroyed. You see, I can honestly say that the values and beliefs that I hold as truth in my life, are the values and beliefs that I have acquired through my personal interactions with others in our U.S. culture. I find that my values and worldviews differ from those of similar Latino heritage. Can I attest this to my experience with domestic violence; I'm certain that I can; however, I would also say that a greater part of me has been influenced by the multitude of experiences unrelated to domestic violence.

In no way will I ever deny that this experience has impacted my personal values and worldview; and yes, I am certain that I have biases in regard to the topic of domestic violence. However, through this process and other processes that I have engaged in throughout the years, I believe that I have come to be fully aware of them and am able to hold them in suspension when interacting with those around me who have their own experiences with domestic violence.

As a result of my own personal experience with domestic violence, and my goal to keep this experience suspended during this project, precautions were built into the design of this study. For instance, I took additional methodological measures (see auditing in methods section) to insure that any personal biases did not influence the interpretation of data collected for this study.

Moreover, through this process called “Epoche,” I realized that the first thing I need to do when interviewing participants is to let them tell their story if they wanted to, just like I told my story to you. In doing this, I will capture the essence of their experience and can then, and only then, expand with questions that enrich the understanding of culture and its influence on these experiences and their meanings.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

What is Domestic Violence?

According to the Center for Disease Control (2006), domestic violence, also known as Interpersonal Violence (IPV), is abuse that occurs between two individuals involved in a close relationship (i.e., married, divorced, engaged, dating, etc.) and involves the use of violence to intimidate, control and/or cause harm to one's partner. Examples include; punching, kicking, burning, slapping and/or any other use of physical force. However, domestic violence is only one of several types of abuse that can occur between two individuals involved in an intimate relationship. Other forms of domestic abuse include, forcing a partner to take part in a sexual act (sexual abuse), threatening a partner with words, weapons, gestures, or any other means used to communicate harm (verbal/psychological abuse), threatening a partner's sense of self-worth, threatening a partner's possessions and/or loved ones, stalking and/or restricting a partner from engaging with friends and/or family (emotional abuse), (Center for Disease Control, 2006). The Center for Disease Control (2006) states that domestic violence often begins with emotional abuse and often progresses to physical and/or sexual abuse and that the different types of domestic abuse often co-occur. The co-occurrence of these behaviors amounts to one instance of domestic abuse every 36 seconds and in 1998 accounted for over three deaths per day (Rennisson & Welchans, 2000).

Domestic violence can occur in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships and victimizes both men and women; however, the literature indicates that women are

much more likely to become victims of domestic violence than are men and are more likely to suffer both physical and psychological injuries due to the violent abuse (Gelles, 1997). Specifically, the literature suggests that women are 5-8 times more likely than men to experience violence in their intimate relationships (U.S. Department of Justice (1998) and notes that the use of physical force is the oldest documented means for keeping subordinate groups in their place. The history of women being one of those subordinate groups throughout the world makes them a more poignant target than any other group in society.

Historical Overview

The subordinate status of women has described the United States since its inception. The history of women as subordinate to men throughout the world makes them a poignant target for domestic violence (U.S. Department of Justice, 1988). Moreover, women of color have an additional status of subordination in our society, making their experience with domestic violence even that much more unique. Throughout U.S. history, state laws and cultural practices supported a man's right to discipline his wife through whatever means he felt necessary (Gelles, 1997). In the United States, it has only been a hundred years since men were denied the legal right to beat their wives (Gelles, 1997). In fact, throughout the 1800's U.S. state laws and cultural practices supported a man's right to chastise and discipline his wife with any instrument he felt necessary. Moreover, it wasn't until 1895 that women were granted the right to divorce their husbands on grounds of abuse (Gelles, 1997). It was this societal philosophy that today makes it difficult to determine whether or not domestic violence prevalence rates have

truly decreased. In fact, it was not until the 1980's that serious attempts to measure domestic violence prevalence rates were conducted (Gelles, 1997).

Prior to the 19th century, it was considered a necessary aspect of a husband's obligation to control his wife through the use of physical force and violence. Today, such practices are prohibited by law; however, some cultures still support such practices (Field & Field, 1973; Straus, 1976; Gelles, 1997). With the advent of the Women's Movement during the 1960's, domestic violence gained public attention (Gelles, 1997; Pleck, 1987; Dutton, 1995). In the 1970's, feminist women's centers offered a safe place for women in crisis. Domestic violence went from being a private family matter, warranting no legal intervention, to a societal problem that not only required legal action but also the development of therapeutic interventions for both perpetrator and victim. Early interventions were primarily in the form of psycho-educational groups for perpetrators and psychotherapy programs for victims. Since then, a large volume of research has informed more elaborate treatment programs for victims of domestic violence and has influenced the development of legal interventions requiring law enforcement officials to intervene at the first sign of violence between domestic partners (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, much of the research has influenced the development of "safe homes" and "domestic violence shelters," all created in an attempt to ensure that victims of domestic violence have a safe place to turn to when, and if, they should decide to do something about their abuse.

Currently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000) recognizes that violence (including domestic violence) is the leading cause of death, disability and

hospitalization in the United States and has been targeted for action by the nation's public health plan. Moreover, since 1994 a significant amount of federal funding has been allocated to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in order to develop and evaluate programs that help prevent violence against women (Klevens, 2007). Currently, the CDC uses a four-step model to collect information and transfer that information into action. This model uses the following steps to help guide research and prevention in the area of domestic violence:

1. Collect information on the magnitude and severity of domestic violence in order to determine its priority for intervention.
2. Establish factors associated with the problem in order to identify populations at risk and potential causes.
3. Develop and evaluate strategies to modify these factors.
4. Disseminate and implement these strategies if proven effective.

By use of this four-step model, the CDC has determined that domestic violence affects women from all racial and ethnic groups; however, what is not known is how differently domestic violence affects women from differing racial and ethnic groups. Acknowledging that most research in the area of domestic violence has been limited to Caucasian women, in the past few years the CDC has promoted domestic violence research with racial and ethnic minority groups, (Klevens, 2007) and has been a major source of development in the area of domestic violence prevention and intervention.

Effects of Domestic Violence on its Victims

The effects of domestic violence have been well documented by numerous researchers (e.g., Arriaga & Capezza, 2005; Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2005; Campbell, 2004; Dutton, 2008; Woods, 2005; Walker, 1995; 1994; 1989; 1984; 1979). In order to fully understand domestic violence, it is important to comprehend not only the various types of abuse discussed above, but also the pattern of abuse and the function it serves the batterer.

In an unprecedented exploration into the lives of domestic violence victims, Rand & Saltzman (2003) detail the results of 639,000 interviewed females ages 12 years and older. The study was conducted by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) between 1992 and 1999. Results indicate that 87% of crimes against women are domestically related. In other words, nearly all of the crimes against women are committed by an intimate partner. These researchers estimate that each year, between 1992 and 1999, over 908,000 women became victims of domestic violence. They reported that approximately 50% of all domestic violence survivors were physically injured and 99% reported that the current abuse was perpetrated by the same individual who committed the previous abusive incident. It is important to note that the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) does not include incidents of psychological abuse and/or stalking limiting their report to only physical abuse. This is important because psychological abuse typically occurs, both prior to, and long after the physical abuse has stopped. In fact, Walker (1979) made this point very clear when she described wife battering and the vicious cycle the batterer takes his/her victim through on a repeated basis.

In order to more fully understand the psychological and physical effects of domestic violence on its victims, a clear understanding of how it occurs and continues must be undertaken. Walker (1979) described this abusive pattern and coined this pattern “The Cycle of Violence.” The Cycle of Violence describes the context in which battering often occurs in and predictably follows. According to Walker (1979), the Cycle of Violence begins with the couple basically being okay, and interactions typically being positive; however, once real life issues begin to set in tension between the couple begins to mount. These tensions may be caused by anything from having a bad day to changes in job status or major financial losses; however, in abusive relationships the abuser’s tension continues to escalate and his/her need for power and control render the victim powerless and feeling as though he/she is walking on eggshells (Walker, 1979).

As the tension continues to escalate, phase two, the “Explosion” of this vicious cycle begins. In this phase, an explosion of anger takes place and ends with a battering event. The abuser may hit, attack, verbally assault, threaten, or scream at his/her partner. The batterer will often place blame onto the victim for his/her battering behaviors; however, it is well-recognized that batterers usually take control of the situation with violent behaviors and typically will blame their victims regardless of how abnormal their violent behavior (Walker, 1979).

In the third phase (Loving & Contrite) the batterer is likely to have experienced a physiological release of tension. He/she may feel remorseful, guilty and/or sorry. At this time he/she may try anything to make up for the abuse. Essentially, he/she may behave in a courting manner, buying his/her partner gifts and romancing him/her as in the

beginning of the relationship. However, the one thing that continues is the blaming of the victim. The abuser will likely continue to place blame onto the victim for having caused the explosion and ultimately the abuse. As this phase continues, the loving and contrite feelings begin to fade once again for the batterer. Tension begins to build, and the cycle of violence begins once again (Walker, 1979)

Walker (1979) makes it clear that without intervention this cycle does not get better and does become more frequent. Additionally, she states that the violence escalates over time and the loving and contrite stage becomes shorter and less apologetic. Eventually, this stage drops out entirely and at this point the victim is in the greatest amount of danger and likelihood of experiencing abuse leading to his/her death.

The Cycle of Violence and Traumatic Bonding

For women of all cultures, developing a tolerance for the abuse is very important to their survival. However for the Latina woman, issues compounding her survival make tolerance to the abuse that much more critical. For example, Latina immigrant women may not have the luxury of an extended family nearby or they may lack the economic and/or social skills necessary to survive in this country. They may not have the knowledge of protective services and/or the existence of battered women's shelters. They may not understand that domestic violence is against the law and may fear being blamed by the law for their husband's abusive behaviors (Dutton, 1992).

With these barriers in mind, it is not very difficult to see how a victim of domestic violence can become overly dependent on her abuser. The effect of domestic violence on

a victim's relational attachment to her abuser has been coined "traumatic bonding." Traumatic bonding occurs when the domestic violence victim becomes isolated and begins to lose her sense of self-worth, self-efficacy and self-reliance. In turn, this isolation increases her need for emotional and social support, and she becomes increasingly dependent on the abuser (Dutton 1992). Again, it is not difficult to see how a Latina woman, who may likely be dependent on her husband because of her cultural values, may hold a unique perspective on her experience.

One thing is quite clear from the review of research on domestic violence; domestic violence is not a one-time event. Rather, it is an event that repeats, endures over time and renders its victims dependant on the abuser. This traumatic bonding has resulted in a vast amount of literature regarding the reasons why women return to abusive relationships (Anderson, 1997, Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1996; Sullivan et al., 1992). In one sample of women recruited from a Midwest women's shelter, 79% had at some point returned to their abusive partners at least once and 19% reported leaving their abusive partners at least 10 times (Sullivan et al., 1992b).

Three assumptions can be made regarding the effect of traumatic bonding; (a) the battered woman briefly leaves the abusive relationship, intending to return, in order to make a statement that abusive behaviors will not be tolerated, (b) the battered woman intends to permanently leave the abusive relationship; however, when she discovers that opportunities outside of the relationship are less than she expected (e.g., shelters are overcrowded, employment opportunities are unavailable, childcare needs are unmet), (c) she has no other viable options than to return (Anderson, 1997).

Societal Impact of Domestic Violence

In their attempt to understand the influence of domestic violence on the U.S. health care system, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) funded the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS). Based on NVAWS data, an estimated 5.3 million women experience domestic violence in the United States each and every year (Center for Disease Control, 2003). Additionally, domestic violence is responsible for over 2 million injuries each year, half of which require medical attention. Moreover, victims of domestic violence lose an average of 8 million days of paid work each year. The CDC estimates that domestic violence costs the U.S. health care system 5.8 billion dollars each year, and estimates a loss of roughly 1 billion dollars in lost productivity from paid work for victims of domestic violence.

The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) also reports a lifetime prevalence rate of exposure to domestic violence, for Latina women, of 23.4% (Tjaden & Theonnes, 2000). However, among rural Latinas, a slightly lower prevalence rate of 19.5% has been reported (Denham, Frasier, Hotten, Belton, Newton & Gonzalez, 2007). In striking contrast, Ingram (2007) reports that half of the U.S. population of Latinas reports being exposed to some form of domestic violence.

Today, more qualitative data are needed to better understand the magnitude of domestic violence and the economic costs associated with this epidemic. Qualitative research projects can result in data that can help gain a better understanding of how prevention programs can tailor their services to victims of color, specifically, Latina victims of domestic violence.

Again, it is expected that the current study will lend itself in many ways to the understanding of domestic violence and the meanings that Latina women place on their experience of domestic violence which will help meet the needs mentioned above.

Domestic Violence and the Concept of Culture

The concept of culture means something roughly similar to social heredity. The concept covers a vast domain of behaviors, values and beliefs that are passed down from one generation to another by members of that culture (Strauss, 1926; Williams, 1970). Social norms are driven by one's culture and regulate almost all aspects of an individual's life. They provide a blueprint of appropriate behavior and, in the context of domestic violence, may even justify a husband's reasons for abusing his wife. Therefore, what follows is a look into the literature of Latino culture, its values, norms and beliefs, and other aspects of the culture that may help explain domestic violence in the Latina population. The cultural aspects discussed, familismo, marianismo, machismo, gender roles and religion, are imperative aspects of the Latino culture that need to be understood before trying to understand domestic violence in this culture.

Familismo

There is considerable evidence demonstrating that Latino families tend to have an interdependent orientation. Central to this orientation are the values and beliefs each family member holds regarding one another and their role in the family. Certain cultural characteristics of Latino families have been thought to influence the occurrence of domestic violence. One of these cultural characteristics is the concept of familismo, or familism. Familismo refers to the attitudes, behaviors and family structures within an

extended family system and it is believed to be the most important factor influencing Latinos. Within the Latino culture, the centrality of the family unit is considered to be extremely strong and sternly adhered to (Diaz-Guerrero, Lichtszajn & Reyes, 1979). The collectivistic nature of the traditional Latino culture places great emphasis on the family unit. It is this belief and family value that Latinos emphasize within their lives. This emphasis keeps the family unit strictly intact and keeps the object of obligation on the family and to the family, for it is the primary source of deep emotional attachment (Diaz-Guerrero, et al., 1979). The sense of loyalty to the family unit has long been accused as being the source of why Latina women remain in domestically abusive relationships, appear to be incapable of recruiting support systems, and are less likely to obtain help from sources outside of the family unit (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994).

Various types and degrees of familismo exist within the Latino culture. Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) introduce two types of familismo responsible for each of the three dimensions encompassing the overall concept of familismo.

Attitudinal Familismo

According to these authors, the attitudinal dimension of familismo is described as the belief that family members possess more positive attributes and characteristics than do non-family members. Moreover, it is this belief that keeps the family unit closed off to non-relatives and serves to maintain the desire of exchanging emotional resources and support with family members only (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Keefe (1980) tested the construct of attitudinal familismo by comparing Latinos and Anglos on the likelihood of their endorsing kinship versus friendship ties. Keef (1980) found that Latinos were

significantly more likely to endorse family members as more reliable than were Anglos. Additionally, results also indicated that Latinos were more likely to endorse caring for an elderly family member than were Anglos (Keef, 1980). Moreover, in a study conducted by Vernon & Roberts (1985), these researchers found that Latinos were more likely than Anglo-Americans to endorse turning to a family member versus a friend to talk about a personal problem. Lastly, Sabogal, Marin, and Otero-Sabogal (1987) found that less acculturated Latinos felt more indebted to provide emotional and material support to family members than Latinos who were more acculturated. Additionally, when asked if they felt supported by their families, Latinos (regardless of their level of acculturation) reported significantly higher scores than did Anglos (Sbogal, Marin, & Otero, 1987).

Behavioral Familismo

The actual reception of support from relatives (both material and/or emotional) in Latino families has been coined behavioral familismo from several researchers (Coohey, 2001). Behavioral familismo focuses on the amount of support received from actual family members and not the support received from other social support systems (i.e., friends, church, etc.). In several studies comparing Latinas and Anglos on behavioral familismo (e.g., Keefe, 1980; Mindel, 1980; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994), results indicated that Latina women report higher support from family members than Anglo women. Additionally, Latina women constantly report a higher degree of desire to turn to family members for support than do Anglo women (Coohey, 2001).

Machismo/Marianismo

Cultural scripts support the imbalance of power between Latino men and women. In Latin culture, the male script supporting this imbalance has been coined “machismo.” Parilla (1994) explains the concept of machismo as encompassing the negative aspects of “sexual prowess, heavy alcohol consumption, and aggressive behaviors” toward women. Moreover, they describe the Latina women’s script (“marianismo”) as a Latina women’s role of submissiveness, docile, self-sacrificing and stoic (p. 326). Machismo and marianismo both confirm the cultural belief that the male reigns supreme over the female and his family, and ultimately is in a position of power and responsibility (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994). These two concepts include the beliefs that; (a) a child should always be obedient to his/her parents, (b) virginity is of great value to the single woman, (c) life is meant to be harder for a woman than for a man, (d) a good wife must always be faithful to her husband, (e) a good wife maintains the traditional structure of dynamics within the family (f) it is more important to obey and respect your husband than it is to love him and (g) a woman who dishonors her family should be severely punished. These scripts provide an environment that is ripe for the occurrence of domestic violence (Perilla, 1994).

Although, the link between traditional gender role attitudes and domestic violence is weak (Sugarman & Frankel, 1996), machismo has often been used to explain domestic violence in the Latino population. However, Baca-Zinn (1982) and Sugihara & Warner (2002) have demonstrated that male dominance is not that typical among Latinos, and attitudes toward gender roles have not been associated with domestic violence among Latinos (Klebens, 2007).

Because traditional Latino culture places the burden of relationship success on the female, a sense of failure and continuous self-blame occurs when Latina women seek help outside of the family unit. Even when domestic violence is occurring, this sense of failure and self-blame occurs (Dutton, 1992). Although the literature in this area is inconclusive, some women do blame themselves for the violence instilled upon them. With regard to these women, Dutton (1992, p.67) has identified three types of self-blame occurring in Latina women who seek help outside of the family unit: (a) blame for causing violence or 'occasioning' its occurrence, (b) blame for not being able to stop the violence or change the batterer's behavior, and (c) blame for not being able to tolerate the violence. Due to the concepts of familismo, machismo, and marianismo being inculcated into the lives of Latina women, these acts of self-blame are extremely difficult to overcome. The belief that keeping the family together is the sole responsibility of the Latina woman and keeps her from seeking help and places her in a position of self-sacrifice for the better good of the family (Diaz-Guerrero, Lichtszajn & Reyes, 1979).

In his attempt to describe Latina wives, Diaz-Guerrero (1994) states that the real road of self denial begins long before maternity. It begins the moment she denies her needs and fulfills the needs of others in her family. Moreover as the Latina wife gives more of herself, the Latino husband continues to fulfill his cultural drive to be a good provider. These culturally driven values are the cause of his expectancy that she will take care of all responsibilities at home and he doesn't even want to know what goes on in his home. Additionally, the Latino husband expects that he will be the focus of respect from his family and that no one will disobey him or question his authority. Consequently, these Latino cultural values and practices often collide with Euro-American values and lead

many to believe that machismo, familismo and marianismo are negative Latino values that degrade women and unjustly empower men to be controlling beasts without care or love for their wives and families. Additionally, Latino men pride themselves in being good providers; however, research suggests that Latino men become aggressive toward their wives and families when they are met with disobedience and/or disrespect and it is their attempt to regain what they perceived to have lost (Avila & Avila, 1980).

Latin Culture and Parenting Style

Two related and very important values in the Latino culture, that may be influencing the likelihood of becoming a victim of domestic violence as an adult, are the authoritarian style of parenting children and gender roles (Alvarez & Bean, 1976). Latino parents may be teaching their children (especially female children) to obey their parents; however, these children are also learning to be submissive to all male figures (especially their husbands). Moreover, from very early childhood, children are taught not to challenge their father's authority and learn that not even their mother is allowed to challenge his authority. Avila, et al. (1980) argue that this lends support to the belief that women in Latin culture are of less status than men and that children learn this differential status early on leading to Latina women having less confidence in themselves and ultimately having subordinate roles in their intimate relationships. It is obvious that the influence of parenting prepares children for their future and teaches children what to expect from others in their own intimate relationships, and what to expect parenting roles to be like for themselves as partners in intimate relationships with others.

Latin Culture Gender Roles

In their depiction of Latin gender roles, Perilla, Bakeman & Norris (1994) describe Latino men as dominant, authoritarian figures, whereas Latina women are caregivers and nurturers who take care of everyone else before themselves (p. 326). Alvarez & Bean (1976) explain that the status of Latino men is one assigned as super-ordinate and absolute head of household, giving him absolute and unquestionable authority over his wife and children. This role involves power, prestige and honor. In fact, authority is delegated within the family through males leaving the females in the family to submit to even the youngest male. These cultural scripts of dominance and submission support the imbalance of power and control in the Latino family and provide an environment that is ripe for the occurrence of domestic violence (Perilla, 1999).

Latin Culture and Religion

Although a wealth of research has explored various aspects of domestic violence (e.g., unemployment, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, pregnancy, etc.), religious variations in domestic violence remain understudied, and the relationship between Latina's religious affiliations and their experience with domestic violence remains virtually unstudied (Ellison, Bartkowski & Anderson, 1999). In one of the few studies investigating religious beliefs and abuse in Anglo populations, Gelles (1974) reports that data from a small New England community survey indicated that partners who differed in religious affiliation from one another reported higher risks of partner abuse. In a Canadian study examining the relationship between religious involvements and self-reported domestic violence, results were unclear regarding the association between religious beliefs and value, and amount of domestic violence reported (Brinkerhoff,

Grandin, & Lupri, 1992). Reiterating the statement made above, the literature on religious beliefs and their influence on domestic violence remains understudied and unstudied in the Latina population.

It is not unmerited to assume that a large percentage of Latino/a individuals adhere to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. According to the first Roman Catholic law of marriage, married women were to conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and that husbands would rule all aspects of their wives' lives (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). What this meant was that husbands were the absolute patriarch who owned and controlled every aspect within the family. Today, many of these beliefs remain intact within Latino families.

The Roman Catholic religion, with its martyr-like views of the "Virgin Mary" and prohibition of divorce is an important aspect of Latino life (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994). Latinos incorporate the Roman Catholic religious beliefs, values and views into almost every aspect of their lives especially their family life. Moreover, a wealth of evidence demonstrating that individuals who embrace literal views of the Bible tend to prefer patriarchal gender roles may accurately describe Latino families and their adherence to the Bible and patriarchal gender roles (Ellison, 1999). However, a major gap continues to exist in the literature in understanding what role religious beliefs, values and traditions provide in the development of Latina's perspectives on domestic violence and how these beliefs, values and traditions help shape these experiences. A need exists to help bridge this gap and facilitate a better understanding of religious values and beliefs and their

influence on the development of meanings that Latina women place on their experiences with domestic violence.

Latinas in the U.S. and Domestic Violence

Because Latinos compose 13.4% of the U.S. population and are the largest minority group in the U.S., special funding has been made available for the implementation of domestic violence research with this group. In fact, findings from CDC funded research studies of Latinas and domestic violence suggest that rural Latinas have a lifetime prevalence rate of exposure to domestic violence of 19.5% (Denham, et al., 2007) and Latinas living in non-rural areas have a lifetime prevalence rate of 23.4% (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

It is important to remember that a large portion of domestic violence incidents go unreported. With this in mind, Ingram (2007) set out to ask Latinas specific questions regarding their experience with domestic violence. Based on the answers given in his study, Ingram found that half of the Latino populations in the U.S. have been exposed to some sort of interpersonal violence in their lifetime; however, it is also believed that many more fail to report their exposure to domestic violence (Ingram, 2007).

The factors that impede Latinas from reporting domestic violence are strongly connected to their socio-cultural values. These values include; (1) their dedication to their children, (2) their willingness to self-sacrifice for their families, (3) their level of marital devotion, (4) the culture's value on collectivism, and (5) their strong belief in family privacy (Erez, 2000). However, it is believed that these values have encapsulated the Latina women robbing her of her own identity and constraining her to being defined by

the patriarchal culture that prevents her from reporting her abuse for fear of losing the only identity she has as a Latina woman (Erez, 2000).

Despite the fact that domestic violence affects women of all cultures and ethnicities, Latina women tend to be younger, less educated, and more economically disadvantaged than non-Latino White victims (Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1988). Similarly, domestic violence rates among Latina women are associated with low income (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002), with witnessing domestic violence as a child (Perilla, 1999; Rouse, 1988), urbanicity (Lown & Vega, 2001) and with power, possessiveness or jealousy (Sugihara & Wagner, 2002). Lastly, although the main culprit for domestic violence among Latinos appears to be jealousy and male drinking, these seem to be similar across all ethnic and racial groups (Torres, 1991).

Dutton, Orloff & Hass (2000) state that the economic dependence, fear of losing custody of their children, not wanting to separate the children from their father, and believing that their abusive partner will change are the reasons Latinas provide for not leaving their abusive partners. Battered Latinas have been found to seek help for domestic violence abuse less often than any other ethnicity (West, Kantor & Jasinski, 1998). West, et al., (1998), report that although victims of domestic violence from different ethnic groups tend to share their experiences with family and/or friends, Latinas are half as likely to consult family or friends.

Why Women Don't Leave

Battered women typically do not leave their abusive relationships the first time they are abused (Barnett, 2000; Campbell, Miller, Cardwell, & Belknap, 1994;

Follingstad, Hause, Rutledge, & Polek, 1992; Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991). Although certain phenomena in life are universal, the meanings attributed to them and the consequent behaviors in response to them are group specific (Porter & Villarruel, 1993). In an attempt to better understand the process that Latina women take in leaving their abusive relationships, the Pan American Health Organization launched a community study in 10 countries in Latin America (Belize, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru). The purpose of this study was to record the process that women who have suffered domestic violence go through in ending their abusive relationships. The Spanish name for this process was La Ruta Critica (The Critical Path). This “critical path” refers to the series of decisions and actions taken by the domestic violence victim as she comes to terms with the violent situation and the responses she encounters from others in her search for help. The qualitative study involved over 500 in-depth interviews with women who had been abused and more than 1000 interviews with service providers, as well as 50 focus group sessions. Women who had been victims of domestic violence identified several factors that can act as triggers for action. These included an increase in the severity or frequency of the violence, economic considerations, emotional considerations and judicial ones. Many women, for instance, expressed concern about their ability to support themselves and their children. The women interviewed also frequently expressed feelings of guilt, self-blame or being abnormal. Corruption and stereotyping by gender in the judicial system and among the police were also mentioned. The greatest inhibiting factor, though, was fear that the consequences of telling someone or of leaving would be worse than staying in the relationship.

From the Ruta Critica study, it is clear that there are many factors that have a bearing on an abused woman's decision to leave the abusive relationship. However, this study did not investigate the meanings that these women place on their experience and how their lived experiences are influenced by other cultural factors such as religious beliefs, and family values were limited because it investigated women in their countries of origin and not in the U.S.

Theories of Domestic Violence

In 1983, E. Walker developed the terminology "The battered woman syndrome". This was the first time in history that a woman's trauma symptoms were recognized and characterized (Dutton, 1992). These characterizations, of a woman's traumatic abuse symptoms, lead to the development of two stress response theories; one theory refers to what is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) theory, and the other theory refers to another form of psychological adaptation to traumatic events. The responses of domestic violence victims often manifest themselves as increased anxiety, depression and most often symptoms related to PTSD; hence, the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder theory of domestic violence (Rosenthal, 2000).

The latter theory attempts to explain why women remain in abusive relationships by stating that a battered woman's cognitive schema (referring to core beliefs she has about herself and the world she lives in) changes in ways that make her vulnerable, meaningless and helpless (Dutton, 1992). For victims of domestic violence, these changes in cognitive schemata are devastating. Changes in the way a victim once saw herself, and the world, as safe and secure, are flipped upside down because the person she chose to be in an intimate relationship with is the source of much physical and psychological anguish

(Dutton, 1992). The loss of meaning renders victims of domestic violence helpless. In fact, Walker (1984) alluded to the apparent passive/helpless response of the domestic violence victim, in her description of the cycle of violence, when she states that the victim of domestic violence becomes confused by this repetitive cycle and in time becomes uncomplaining of her abuser's violent behavior (Walker, 1984).

Lastly, the application of the theory of helplessness to domestic violence victims seems to be of great debate in the literature and several authors argue that applying this theory to domestic violence victims is essentially a misapplication of the theory (Edleson & Eisikovits, 1996, p. 106). Additionally, applying the learned helplessness theory to victims of domestic violence contributes to a very negative view of the domestic violence survivor and in some sense confounds the drive to learn more about the phenomena and its victims.

CHAPTER III

Methods

Phenomenological Approach to the Problem

The tradition of inquiry in this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology is the scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them in our consciousness, and does not concern itself with matters of fact but seeks to uncover meanings of the phenomena being studied. Phenomenology describes the meaning of lived experiences for individuals experiencing a particular phenomena or concept (Creswell, 1998). According to Moustakas (1994), any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for scientific inspection. Additionally, Moustakas also asserts that phenomenology is the first method of knowledge because it begins with the phenomenon itself and not an offshoot of the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1994) offers key concepts of phenomenology that were used in this study; they are as follows:

1. Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas concepts, judgments and understandings.
2. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences and not explanations or analysis.
3. Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give direction and focus to a meaning, and in themes that sustain inquiry.

4. Phenomenology concerns itself with the wholeness of the phenomena or concept being explored. It examines the phenomena from many angles, sides and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of the phenomena is achieved.
5. Phenomenology focuses on the appearances of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from routine and biases, from what we are told is true in the natural world of everyday living.
6. The researcher's perception of the phenomena and the experience interrelates with one another to make the objective subjective and vice versa.
7. Every perception of the phenomena begins with the researcher's personal sense of the experience and what it means.
8. The researcher's own thinking, intuiting, reflecting and judging are considered primary evidences of the scientific investigation.
9. The research questions must be constructed carefully so as to assure that primary words appear immediately and guide the phenomenological process toward seeing, reflecting and knowing.

In addition to these key concepts, Moustakas asserts that phenomenological research questions emerge from autobiographical experiences. In other words, these are the questions that emerge from one's own curiosity or fervor for knowledge regarding the phenomena being explored. These questions seek not a specific answer, rather they seek to better understand the phenomena and capture the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p.49).

Phenomenology is appropriate for this study because what is being sought is the participant's perception of domestic violence and this is the primary source of knowledge. Participant's descriptions of their experiences with domestic violence revealed the essence and meanings placed upon the experience of domestic violence. Moreover, these essences and meanings greatly deepened the current understanding of domestic violence and its victim's experiences.

Selection of the Participants

Regarding the most appropriate sampling method for this study, purposeful sampling allowed me to specifically select participants and sites because they purposefully informed an understanding of domestic violence (Creswell, 2007, p.125). Specifically, participants were recruited from a local Midwestern agency that provides crisis intervention, advocacy and prevention services for domestic violence, incest and sexual assault victims. *Voices of Hope* currently serves over 15,000 individuals and families and provides both clinical and non-clinical services. This agency began in 1974 as the *Lincoln Coalition against Rape*, a campus/community group organized to provide support services to victims of sexual assault. In 1976 the organization became part of *Family Services Association*. In 1978, the program expanded to include domestic violence and received National Justice Funds. The program continued to grow, adding services for incest survivors, until in 1989 it incorporated as the *Rape/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center*, an independent non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation in order to more exclusively focus on the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and incest.

Permission from the agency coordinator had been granted in order to extend this specific research opportunity to the domestic violence victims they serve.

Currently, Voices of Hope works in conjunction with other organizations in the Lincoln, Nebraska area, to help these Spanish-speaking women, as well as other women, cope with their experiences. Together with a Voices of Hope facilitator, these women meet twice a week and discuss issues related to their experiences. As previously mentioned, Voices of Hope also works in conjunction with other organizations to help these women with other issues that may not be directly related to their domestic violence experience (e.g. Nebraska Food Banks, Energy Assistance Programs, etc.).

Recruitment of Participants

Due to the nature of the phenomenon and subsequent research interviews, participants were at least 19 years of age. Participants over the age of 19 are legal adults in the state of Nebraska and presumed to be better suited for comprehending and expressing their abusive experience. As mentioned above, participants were victims of domestic violence that had sought out help from the agency mentioned above. The aim for this project was to recruit at least 10 participants. This decision was influenced by Creswell's recommendation that a phenomenological study needs at least 10 participants in order to make assertions regarding the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 1999). Ten participants were interviewed; however, only seven of the ten interviews were interpretable. One participant only participated enough for the secondary gain of \$25 and then terminated her participation and did not yield any interpretable results. The other two participants reported that their experience with domestic violence occurred in 1976

and in 1989 in Mexico, but did not continue upon their immigration to the United States; therefore, results of their interviews, although interesting, did not meet criteria for the current study. It was anticipated that participants would all be Latinas with varying backgrounds and social-economic statuses. Although the Latina population in Lincoln, Nebraska is mixed, the women of this study turned out to be primarily of Mexican heritage and only spoke Spanish.

The process of participant recruitment began when I met with various groups of women (potential participants), at the request of Voices of Hope, and began to build rapport with these women and the organization. During these meetings, I shared my personal experience with domestic violence (see Epoche) and began to gain the trust of these women, as evidenced by their discussions with me regarding their own experiences with domestic violence. Although I remained mindful of my role as a qualitative researcher, I allowed myself to share my experiences with these women with the intent of providing a level of comfortableness that would allow them to share their difficult experiences with this stranger. In other words, by allowing these women to hear an account of my own experience with domestic violence, it leveled the field so that I was not only seen as an investigator, but was also accepted into the group as a person with a similar experience with domestic violence. Although I did not discuss my personal values and views on domestic violence, I believe that by sharing my experience of domestic violence with these women I provided the right amount of disclosure to facilitate an open and genuine interaction that impacted their ability to discuss their painful experiences with me.

Data Collection

The method of data collection was through interview, and was conducted in the language that the participant was most comfortable using. The timeframe for data collection was six months. The interviews took place at the agency mentioned above. Immediately before the interview, participants received the *Informed Consent Form* (See Appendix B) and it was fully explained to them by the primary investigator. Once the Informed Consent form was signed, then the *Consent to Record Form* (See Appendix C) was introduced and explained as it pertained to the means from which the interview would be recorded. Once the Consent to Record form was signed, then a *Demographics Questionnaire* (See Appendix D) was completed by each participant. The process of explaining and signing the aforementioned forms took approximately 15-20 minutes. Upon completion of these forms, the interview began. The interview took approximately one hour. Once the interview was complete, participants received a \$25 compensation for their participation. Immediately following the interview, taped interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and translated into English. In order to verify the accuracy of the translated transcriptions, the primary investigator reviewed the translated transcripts, and then randomly chose several samples from each transcript and ran the samples through a Spanish-English translation software package, called Babylon Translator. After the interviews were transcribed, participants were offered a Spanish copy, along with several tentative themes that arose from the interview, and a copy of any suggestions and/or comments that I may have created during the interview. Once this process was complete, a follow-up meeting was scheduled with each participant in order to discuss the tentative themes and comments that had been given. Accuracy of

transcriptions and tentative themes were specifically addressed during this follow-up meeting.

Interview Protocol

The aim of the interview protocol (Appendix E) was to investigate, in an in-depth and enriching manner, the meanings that Latina women place on their domestic violence experience. Interview questions were divided into three categories. The first category of questions focused on the participant's overall experience of domestic violence. These questions were designed to establish rapport with the participant while maintaining focus on the phenomena being explored. Sample questions follow below; however, for the full interview protocol, see Appendix E. Although it was anticipated that participants would place unique meanings to their domestic violence experience, it was interesting to explore how these meanings are influenced by their specific and individual cultural values and norms that each Latina participant brought with her into this study.

Sample Questions

Current Experience

Please share with me your most recent experience with domestic violence?

What influenced you the most in your decision to seek help for domestic violence?

How are you different today because of your experience with domestic violence?

Domestic Violence Background

Can you please describe your view of your experience with domestic violence?

How would you describe the impact that domestic violence has had on your life?

How would you describe the way your relationship changed with this person?

In what way would you say that domestic violence has changed your perspective on intimate relationships?

Culture and Domestic Violence

In what way would you say that being a Latina has influenced your experience with domestic violence?

How would you describe the influence that your personal values and beliefs have had on your experience with domestic violence?

In what ways would you say that your upbringing has influenced your experience with domestic violence?

In what way would you say that your family of origin has influenced your experience with domestic violence?

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves a search for meaning (Hatch, 2002). In this phenomenological research project, several important processes took place prior to and during the actual analyses of data. The specific method of analysis for this project was the Van Kamm method of analysis for phenomenological data. This method began with a process called Epoche. This involved setting aside any prejudgments, biases and preconceived notions about the phenomenon that I might have had about domestic violence. By recounting my own experience with the phenomenon being studied, I was able to identify specific biases and preconceived beliefs about the phenomenon. Through this process, I became acutely aware of these biases and was mindful of their potential influence and impact on this study. Once this process was complete, the process of phenomenological reduction occurred. The task involved in this process was to describe the textural language, experience and relationship between the participant and the

phenomenon of domestic violence. Next, the process of “Horizontalization” took place. This involved listing every significant statement made by the participant and giving it equal value. After this, statements that were irrelevant to the phenomenon were deleted, leaving only the “horizons.” From these horizons, meaning units were listed. These meaning units were clustered into common “themes.” These common themes were used to develop the textural descriptions, which are my descriptions of the meanings that each participant has regarding her experience with domestic violence. The next step was to create the structural descriptions by using a process called "imaginative variation". In this process, I utilized varying frames of reference, employed polarities and approached the phenomenon from divergent perspectives in order to describe the context or setting that influenced each participant's domestic violence experience. Lastly, the process of synthesis was undertaken. This process involved integrating the textural and structural descriptions and unifying them into statements of the phenomenon as a whole. This entire process resulted in the representation of the essence of domestic violence at a particular place and time from this researcher's vantage point. The entire research process is depicted in visual format in the Data Analysis Description (Figure 1).

Verification Procedures

The believability of a qualitative study, as well as its credibility, dependability and trustworthiness, are based on the insight, utility and coherence of its findings (Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process in which these concepts are tested is called verification. Rather than the traditional use of validity and reliability to test credibility and dependability of a study, this study used verification techniques proposed by several

qualitative experts (e.g., Creswell, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). The techniques used in this study were as follows:

1. Clarifying the researcher's bias from the outset of the study. Providing the reader with a description of my experience with domestic violence, as well as identified biases regarding the phenomenon, was presumed to help readers of this study understand the researcher's unique position and help clarify possible biases or assumptions that could have impacted the inquiry of data.

2. Using member checking. Member checking involved getting feedback from the study's participants on the accuracy of the identified themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1997). In this study, participants met with the researcher a second time (approximately ten days after their respective interview) to go over themes identified in their interview. Participant's comments, suggestions and requests for changes to the inquiry were duly noted and changed in order to obtain the most accurate meaning that the participant had on her experience with domestic violence; however, none of the participants requested that changes be made, but did offer additional clarification. For instance, one of the participant's found it imperative to clarify reasons for being fearful of deportation, describing the decrepit conditions that she lived in before immigrating to the U.S. Another woman clarified how she felt when she realized that she was alone after being blamed for her husband's abusive behavior. All participant clarifications were duly noted and incorporated into the written transcript and final presentation of the data.

3. Establishing inter-coding agreement. Inter-coder agreement was obtained after having met with each of the participants and after each of the transcripts had been coded

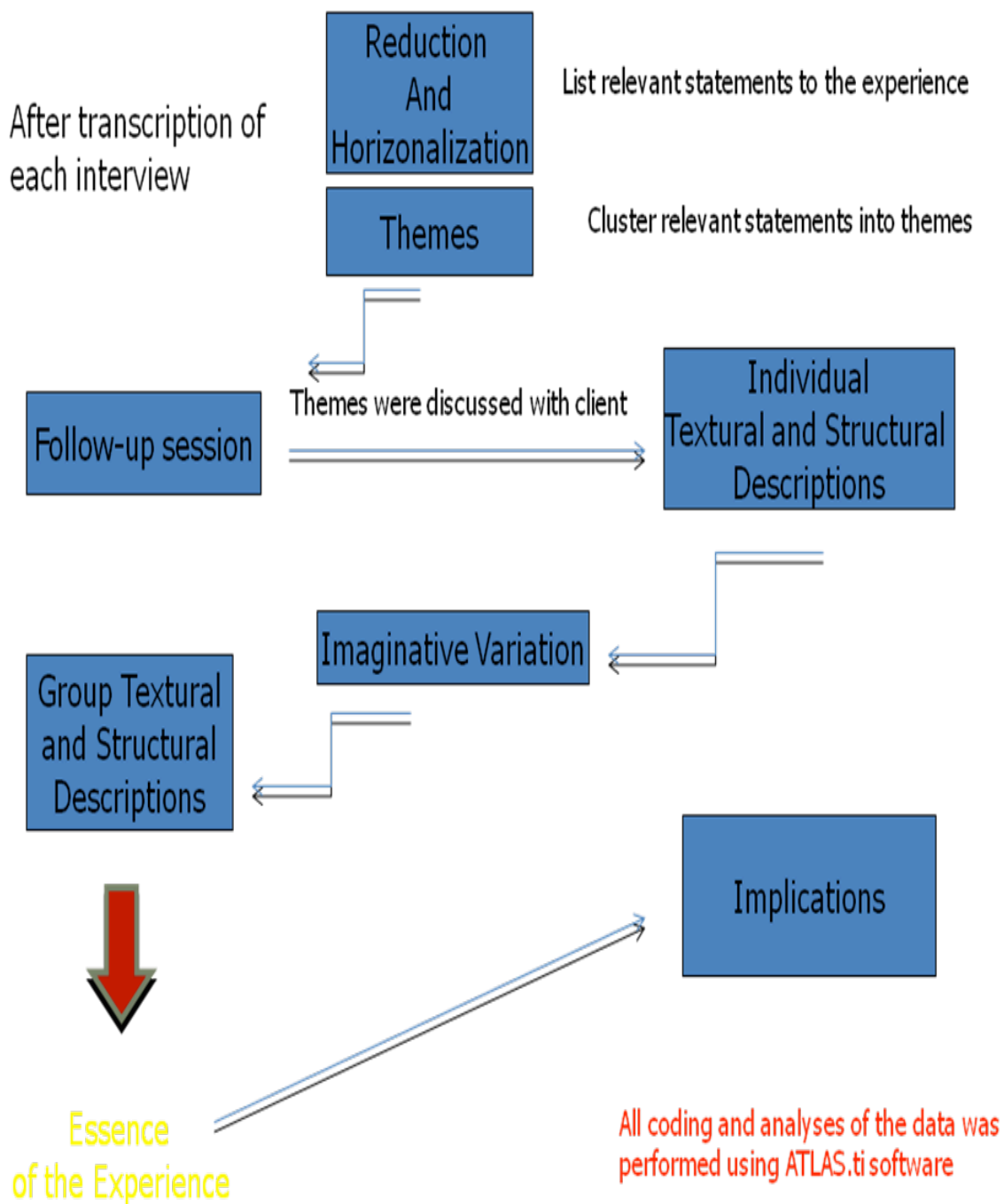


Figure 1. Data Analysis Description

and analyzed for themes. Then an auditor, an advanced graduate researcher familiar with this investigator and his study, audited the study's transcripts and themes.

This was also an additional measure used to identify biases that the primary investigator may have overlooked in the analysis of the data. Specifically, a discussion was conducted about the autonomy of each theme and the possible collapsing of several of the invariant constituents and themes. What had been seven textural themes and six structural themes became five textural themes and five structural themes. "Hopelessness and Isolation" were collapsed into one theme and "Family Response" was expanded to include Family, Friend and Community Response. Lastly, all suggestions and feedback provided by the auditor were incorporated into the final results and finally reviewed in its entirety, completing the inter-coding agreement process.

Ethical Considerations & Safety Protocol

Qualitative research involving battered women requires advanced planning to protect participants and the investigator from the risk of violence from an abusive partner (Langford, 2000). The safety protocol used in this study was designed by a researcher named David Langford at the University of California at San Francisco. Via the development of various domestic violence studies, Dr. Langford created a safety protocol used to protect both participants and investigators of domestic violence research. The protocol used in this study is as follows:

Participant Contact:

- "The investigator initiated contact for scheduling interview times." In this study, the primary investigator met with a representative from Voices of

Hope and this representative informed the investigator of appropriate times to schedule interviews with participants who had expressed interest in the study. Additionally, the representative from Voices of Hope contacted the primary investigator in order to meet with potential participants in a group format so as to introduce himself to the participants and introduce the study and answer any questions they had prior to agreeing to participate.

- “Participants will attend the minimum amount of interviews required for data collection in order to minimize any possible threat of discovery.” In this study, participants only met with the primary investigator two times, once for the interview and the second time for verification of data accuracy.

Interviews:

- “The investigator will not leave the site of the interview (Voices of Hope or the Malone Center) with any of the participants.” In this study, interviews were conducted at the Malone Center where Voices of Hope conducts regularly scheduled group meetings with these women.
- “Interviews will be held in public places.” In this study, all interviews were held at the locations mentioned above and additional personnel (from either Voices of Hope or the Malone Center) were always present and available.

- “Interviews should not exceed 2 hours.” In this study, the initial interview took approximately 1 hour. The second, verification visit, was estimated to take no more than one-half hour. Each verification visit took no more than 25 minutes.
- Interviews may be conducted in a small group in order to provide a sense of security for women meeting a male interviewer.” In this study, participants were given the option of having a female (Voices of Hope) representative present during both visits. The female Voices of Hope representative was someone that participants were very familiar and comfortable with.

Confidentiality

- “The consent form will be an unsigned information page (initialing is acceptable) consistent with the institutional review board’s guidelines. The information page was read to the participants at the beginning of the interview and kept at this researcher’s office rather than with the participant.” In this study, all of the above measures of confidentiality were strictly adhered to.
- “A small cash honorarium should be given to participants so that there will be no social security numbers or check requests that can be traced back to the participant.” In this study, a \$25 cash honorarium was given to each

participant after the interview had concluded. Additionally, receipts were not offered so as to avoid any breach to participant's anonymity.

In summary, the purpose of the study was made clear to each of the participants and each was given the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to any aspect of this study prior to agreeing to participate. Additionally, confidentiality was emphasized at every phase of this study and was completely explained to each participant. Issues of confidentiality were considered salient to each participant; therefore, confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms were used as a way of insuring the anonymity of each participant in this study. The informed consent was read to each participant by this investigator and full disclosure of the nature, purpose, and requirements of the project was made to each participant. The methods and procedures discussed earlier were used as a guide during each of the interviews; however, questions changed slightly to accommodate each participant's style and response during the interview. Additionally, each participant was given the opportunity to review, confirm and change their research data so as to more accurately correspond to their perception of their experience with domestic violence. Lastly, each participant was made fully aware of their right to withdrawal from the study at any time without concern for losing any services received from Voices of Hope and without losing the monetary compensation of \$25 for participating in this study.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTING THE DATA

Consistent with phenomenology, this chapter begins with a detailed description of each participant, before a thorough description of themes ensuing from a systematic analysis of the interviews is presented. In an effort to protect their anonymity, each participant was assigned an identification acronym allowing the primary investigator to identify each of the participants while maintaining participant's anonymity from public domain. Each of the participant's lived experience is described in as much detail as possible; however, extreme caution was taken not to provide an over abundance of information, therefore compromising anonymity. The majority of the women in this study continue to have contact with their abusers and, at the completion of this study, all continued to receive various types of services from Voices of Hope.

In order to provide context to each of their lived experiences, as well as to communicate the depth of their experience, many of the participant's quotes are presented in Spanish, allowing their native voices to be heard, and are translated into English for readability. Their experience is described in the *individual phenomenal description* and is separated into two parts, the *textural description* and the *structural description*. The textural description provides a narrative of what the participant experienced in terms of domestic violence and includes verbatim examples (in their native tongue and English translation). The structural description places their experience into context and is a reflection of the settings in which the experience occurred and the impact it had in various arenas of their lives. Although each participant's experience was

unique, a common thread exists in regard to the context of their domestic violence experience; each occurred within the context of their private homes, and many occurred while children were present. Lastly, an amalgamation of the information is provided that describes the *essence* of each individual's experience with domestic violence; thus, providing a full and complete depiction of their lived experience. Lastly, themes emerging from the use of horizontalization are discussed and presented in much the same manner. A *composite textural description* is provided and serves as a summary of the groups experience with domestic violence as a whole and allows for textural themes to emerge. Likewise, a *composite structural description* is provided and is a summary of the group's structural experience and allows structural themes to emerge. Lastly, each of the descriptions and themes discussed is also provided in table format for the ease of readability.

Individual Phenomenal Descriptions

Abby

Textural Description of Abby: Abby is a thirty-six year old married woman, originally from Mexico City, who has lived in the United States for approximately eighteen years and considers herself to be a devout Catholic. Her experience with domestic violence is quite extensive. She began the interview with a description of a recent domestic violence episode. In her native tongue, she describes her horrifying experience, "él estaba tomado y este usualmente él no tomaba. No seguido pero de vez en cuando, cuando llegaba algún amigo y empezó a tomar con él. Ya eran como las dos de la noche, mas-o-menos, cuando él me dijo que iban a ir a cenar afuera y él estaba ya muy tomado y a el amigo estaba igual y yo entonces yo le dije que no fuera porque era

peligroso porque lo podía parar la policía o podía tener problemas. Él se enojó que él no quería que yo lo controlara, él podía hacer solo lo que él quería, le dije que no y se puso violento. Dijo que él podía hacer lo que él quisiera y empezó a levantar la voz fuerte y los niños estaban dormidos en el cuarto. Cuando yo me fue ya a ver al niño para ver si él se despertó con el ruido, él rompió el teléfono de la cocina lo arrancó y lo aventó a donde yo iba, pero no me alcanzó a pegar pero ya tenía la intención de pegarme. Cuando yo salí del cuarto, le dije yo por qué lo aventaste a me, podías pegar a mí o le podías pegar al niño, él empezó a agarrarme fuerte de aquí de los hombros. Me llevo al cuarto me apachurró fuerte y estuvo apachurrando fuerte. Si me lastimó, pero no me dejó marcas esta vez. Los niños estaban llorando cuando esto pasó. Cuando entró la niña le decía papi ya no le pegues a mamá y él decía yo no le estoy haciendo nada, y entonces yo estaba mirando lo que estaba pasando y al final ya se fue ahí al pasillo, gritando.”

Translated into English, she states that one afternoon her husband had some friends over and they began to drink. The day turned into a late night, and before she knew it, he and his friends decided that they were going to drive over to a local restaurant, to get something to eat. However, Abby thought it was a bad idea, since her husband was intoxicated. She pleaded with him not to go, and described the dangers involved, but he thought she was trying to control him. He insisted on going and an argument ensued. As she was going to check on the children, who were sleeping in the other room, he tore their telephone from the wall and threw it at her. She said it did not reach her but stated that he had intended to hit her with it. He then grabbed her and tossed her about the room before one of the children awoke, and pleaded that he stop hurting her. He stopped, and left their home yelling several obscenities. She went on to say that

she called the police for help, largely because she was afraid and had noticed that his behavior was becoming increasingly violent and repetitive. At the end, he left their home and she called the police. She stated, “I was very afraid. His anger and violent behavior had been escalating for the several days and now I was afraid that he would return and hurt me, and the children.”

Structural Description of Abby: Abby’s experience with domestic violence is influenced by her cultural beliefs and the impact of her immigration to the United States. She describes her naïveté in a manner that incorporates the cultural value of marianismo and explains its impact on her ability to seek safety and comfort from her abusive situation. She explains, “Pues yo antes no sabía nada de que existiera ayuda y ya habíamos pasado antes problemas así pero no, no sabía que hubiera ayuda hasta que de ahí en la policia como era ya segunda vez ellos me refirieron a Voces de Esperanza. Mi esposo me dijo que aquí les marcan a las mujeres que no respetan a sus esposos y les mandan patras a Mexico, o a donde entraran a los Estados Unidos. Translated into English, Abby states, “I wasn’t aware of the help available to women who experience these kinds of problems. I wasn’t aware of the help until the police came to our home for the second time. My husband used to tell me that in the United States, women who disrespect their husband can be sent back to México, or wherever they came from.”

Abby came from Mexico City, a country she describes as having clearly devalued the female role by avoiding the issue of domestic violence, and by its corrupted law enforcers that perpetuate the abuse and allow it to continue to be a major problem. In her Spanish tongue she explains, “En México, si una mujer habla a la policía con un queja de

violencia domestica, o si la mujer se va de su casa encontrando protección de su esposo, la policía no se dan cuenta y también pueden regresarla a su esposo, y a el no le de dicen nada. En México, no defienden la mujer.” Translated from her native Spanish tongue she explains, “In Mexico, if a woman calls the police with a complaint of domestic violence, or if a woman leaves her home in search of protection from her abusive husband, the police are likely to turn a cheek, or in some cases, are likely to return you back to your husband without so much as even a warning. In Mexico, they don’t defend the woman.”

Essence of Abby’s Domestic Violence Experience: To many, Abby’s experience with domestic violence would be considered horrific. To Abby, her experience was impacted by her belief that a “good wife” inherently suffers the pain of being a woman and a mother who considers her family before herself (familismo/familism). She described this inherent suffering in the following statement, "Somos mujeres que tienen que sufrir porque somos enseñados a poner nuestra familia primero." In translation, Abby stated, "We [Latina women] suffer because we've been taught to put our families first."

Additionally, in describing her experience, Abby often made reference to feelings of isolation and loneliness and describes an intense fear of future abusive encounters that continues to be a significant issue that she regularly struggles to overcome. This was evidenced by her following statement, "La experiencia me hizo sentir espantado y sólo. Llegué a ser atemorizado de caerse en la misma trampa abusiva, pero yo también llegué a ser optimista porque fui ahora en los Estados Unidos, donde mujeres son diferentes y no permiten que sí mismos son tratados como eso." Translated to English, Abby stated that her experience [with domestic violence] made me feel afraid and alone. I got to the point of feeling afraid of falling into the same abusive trap, but I also got to a point where I

became optimistic because I was in the United States, where women don't permit themselves to be treated like that [abusively]."

As evidenced by the following comment, " Mis propios valores me han hecho me siento atrapado. He tratado de hacer la cosa correcta pero mi familia no me ha apoyado. Yo me siento como si estoy en impar con hacer lo que tiene razón para mí y para lo que fui enseñado a valorar," it appears, that for Abby, her cultural and religious beliefs continue to keep her connected, better yet incarcerated, to her experience. The lack of family support, the feeling of being alone with her abusive experience, as well as the tug-of-war between her personal values and personal sense and need for safety, continue to strike her down and increase her vulnerability for another round of abuse.

Betty

Textural Description of Betty: Betty describes herself in the following way. "Yo naci en El Salvador. Yo a tenido sies anos en los Estados Unidos. Mi familia son muy fuerte Catolica, pero yo pencia como una mujer Catolica pero tambien feminista, como las mujeres de los Estados Unidos. Para mi, los anos de nina eran Fuertes. Mi papa pegaba a mi mama, pero ella no se dejaba. Mi papa fue alcolico y me pegaba cada los dias. Mi mama se enojaba y peliaba con el. Allie es donde yo aprendi a defenderme, pero tambien aprendi a anojarme."

Translated, Betty states that she is native to El Salvador. She has lived in the United States for six years. As a child she grew up with a strong affiliation to the Catholic faith and strongly identifies herself with, and is attracted to, a feminist perspective and feminist movements found in U.S. culture.

As she describes her experience with domestic violence she becomes angry, a

very unique response that to date has not been fully explored in the domestic violence literature of Latina women. Betty begins by describing her upbringing in El Salvador and states, “Siempre era lo mismo como él trabajaba en una cantina como eso era a diario que llegaba tomado en la noche y siempre llegaba gritando diciéndonos cosas y todo y así fue siempre lo mismo lo mismo nos pegaba, nos regañaba y nos dejaba hacer lo que quisiéramos hacer y este y hasta que ya mi hermano más grande y yo que empezamos a trabajar pues se separaron él y mi mamá. Mi mama era un senora muy fuerte. Por ella, yo entendi que en el mundo yo soy la unica responsable para me seguridad. Gracias a Voice de Hope para lo que me enseñaron.”

Translated into English, she states that the abuse she experienced at the hands of her alcoholic father occurred on a daily basis; however, her mother was a strong woman, who eventually divorced her abusive husband (Betty’s father). Betty states that her anger was the saving grace that protected her from her father, as well as her abusive husband, and allowed her to be a protector to her children. Although she recognizes that she was involved in an abusive relationship for many years, she also explains that her mother taught her that the only person in the world she could count on is herself, and now recognizes this to be the truth, thanks to Voice of Hope.

Structural Description of Betty: Translated from Betty’s native tongue she explains, “Well, I think that we come from our Latin American countries and the way of life in our countries is very different as to what we find here. I had a marriage of 27 years, in which there was always violence. One gets a moral education at home where you have to respect the rules and all that comes along with the rules. They educate us to believe that marriage is forever, that a woman’s value and honor is associated with her

role as a wife and a mother. We're taught that a wife has to endure a lot of things, and when children come you don't want them to grow up without a father. It is hard, but you know no different and you learn to tolerate the struggles that come along with the honor of being a good wife and mother. The bad thing is that when one tolerates the first time, the second and third times get worse. When respect is lost everything is lost. Without respect there is nothing. I guess this works both ways. My husband demands respect, but I've realized, with the help of Voices of Hope, that this respect comes at a loss of my respect for myself. This is so hard for me because my beliefs tell me just the opposite". Betty struggles with the belief that Latina women are considered to be less-than their male counterparts. She feels confused by the mixed messages she's received from her culture, its values, and the belief that Latina women are strong, independent and self supporting women, a belief that was largely provided by her own mother

Essence of Betty's Domestic Violence Experience: Interestingly, Betty's anger with her father has impacted her experience with domestic violence in a way that has empowered her and has allowed her to move toward an independent future, something that the other women of this study have not been able to accomplish, at least not at the level that Betty has accomplished this goal. Although Betty's anger keeps her safe from repetitive bouts of domestic violence, her cultural and religious background and beliefs continue to be replayed in her life and keep her struggling between the values she aspires to and the belief that women are the comforters and nurturers of and for her family, and the martyr that keeps her family together.

Carmen

Textural Description of Carmen's Domestic Violence Experience: Carmen is a

twenty-eight year-old married Latina woman who immigrated to the United State from Mexico six years ago. Currently, Carmen lives with her boyfriend and has been in this relationship for over 6 years. She begins the interview with a description of a recent experience with domestic violence. In her native Spanish tongue she states, “Ahh, ok. Fue hace tres meses un problema entre mi esposo, este y fue así por cualquier cosa chiquita y se hizo algo grande y nos entramos nosotros a pelear los dos y pues, lógico como él la fuerza de un hombre pues son más que la de mujer, y si me dejó marcas si pero le digo que fue la primera y sera la última vez que lo hizo nunca lo había hecho y en realidad no sé si fue por mi culpa o de los dos.”

In translating Carmen’s words into English, we see that she describes this act of domestic violence as the first in her relationship and describes the situation by stating that he became angry over something insignificant and that they both began to fight. She says that she was no match for him, due to his strength as a man and adds that she may be at fault for his violent outburst. She also states that he constantly blames her for his violent behaviors, which she reports is beginning to take a bigger toll on her than the toll of his angry outbursts.

Structural Description of Carmen’s Experience with Domestic Violence:

Interestingly, Carmen’s response indicates the possibility that she blames herself for his violent behavior toward her and describes why she feels this way when she responds to the following question; Usted siente que parte de esto es su culpa? “Pues en parte es por mi carácter pues yo me enojo por cualquier cosa sencilla y como dice él que yo hago las cosas más grandes y como que yo también lo había fastidiado a él esos días yo andaba también de muy mal humor y yo le reclamaba y le decía que él andaba sale y sale y

dando vueltas y yo me enojé y pues de allí empezamos a pelearnos y a aventarnos cosas y empezó el pleito.” Carmen describes herself as flawed. She states that her character is flawed and that her boyfriend confirms this belief by blaming her for his anger. It appears that she is convinced and therefore owns responsibility for the abuse she endured during this event.

Additionally, Carmen describes the context of her experience in the following statement, “Bueno en si la más cercana, mi hermana fue la que supo y este después mis papas cuando estaban allá en Méjico, este no como yo a mi mama pues le dije que yo me quería ir de la casa y eso dejarlo a él y me dijo que ellos también me hechan la culpa que por cualquier cosa me enojo o sea como que lo rectificaron.” Translated, she states that initially her sister was the only one who knew about her boyfriend’s violent behavior. Then she told her mother who responded by blaming Carmen and reinforcing the belief that she is responsible, and bears full fault for her boyfriend’s violent behavior toward her.

Essence of Carmen’s Domestic Violence Experience: Although Carmen’s experience with domestic violence is unique to her, in that it includes abuse as a child and includes a single event of violence as an adult, she exhibits much of the same responses from family that other victims of domestic violence report. That is, Carmen experienced the response of self-blame resulting from an experience or bout with domestic violence. Additionally, Carmen felt isolated and received confirmation of being personally flawed and responsible for her boyfriend’s behavior, when her family failed to support her and help her through her terrible experience.

Deborah

Textural Description of Deborah's Domestic Violence Experience: Deborah is a 36 year-old Latina from Mexico City. She has been married for over fifteen years and has been in the United States for nine years. In her native tongue, Deborah describes her husband as someone who is quick to anger and she is fearful not only of his anger but also of the consequences his anger has on their children. "Cómo la describiría? Pues no se mi situación pues solamente él se comporta en forma violenta porque tiene un mal viejo aunque no tome es de carácter fuerte y por cualquier cosa se enoja, ¿cómo puedo describir eso? ¿cómo puedo definir esa situación? ¿Cuáles serían las consecuencias? Pues yo en mi momento de enojo pues no sé trataría de yo de darle con algo con lo que más le duela pero yo pienso que eso no es lo correcto, agredirlo físicamente ya sea no sé en un momento de estar muy enojada pues puedo agarrar lo que tengo yo enfrente también pero tal vez después me pueda yo arrepentir de lo que hice. Pues si en un momento yo pienso porque si lo adredo tal vez él me puede agredir más fuerte si pues yo pienso también en los niños que tengo digo no quiero que se queden solos que se queden solos tampoco si."

In translating Deborah's words to English, it becomes apparent that Deborah struggles with the thought that her only escape from her abusive relationship may be to defend herself and ask for forgiveness afterwards. She describes this as one option, and a viable one at that, because it provides immediate protection for her children from the violence to which they children have become accustomed to witnessing in the home. However, she also describes the fear she experiences when she thinks about this option failing her. She describes the fear of what her husband might do to her if he survived her attempt at protecting herself and fears what he might do to her children. She describes her

fear as debilitating, keeping her locked and bound to this abusive relationship.

Structural Description of Deborah Domestic Violence Experience: As the other women in this study, Deborah is also an immigrant from Mexico. She describes her experience in the United States in the following manner, “Pues sacar todo lo que tenía pues yo quería platicar con alguien que ellos para que supieran lo que yo andaba pasando para sentirme mejor yo si. Pues al buscar ayuda me iba a sentir yo más tranquila con personas que sabían yo que me estaban apoyando y pues así me iba yo a sentir un poquito más sin pensar en mi situación difícil que estaba yo teniendo. Pero mi esposo no me dejaba ablar con las Americanas porque el decia que las Americana no saben como tratar as sus esposos. Pero una senora vino a mi casa quando el estaba trabajando y me dijo de Voces de Hope. Despues me fui. Me fui con mis hijas y ya tengo un ano sin el.”

Again, translating her spoken words to English, Deborah states that she has always known that speaking with someone about her husband’s violent behavior would help her feel understood and increase her ability to cope with her situation; however, she also states that her husband refused to allow her to communicate with “Americanas” (American women) because he believed that they would have a negative influence on her because “Americanas” do not know how to appropriately care for their husbands.

Again, as it has become apparent, Deborah’s experience with domestic violence has been influenced by her husband’s control and ability to influence her and keep her ignorant of the help available to abused women in our society. Moreover, her inability to communicate in English also increased her feelings of isolation, resulting in a world that solely revolved around her husband and her children. However, Deborah also states that

all it took was one Spanish-speaking woman to educate her about Voices of Hope, before she was able to leave her husband, one year ago.

Essence of Deborah's Domestic Violence Experience: Deborah's experience with domestic violence can best be described in her own words. She described the essence of her experience by stating, "Pues que si nosotras las mujeres yo pienso que si tomamos una decisión y si pues seguir adelante y si estamos ahí también aguantándonos ellos siempre van a estar allí molestándonos y yo se que nosotros podemos salir adelante aunque sea solas y si ellos quieren cambiar o quieren tener una familia tienen que cambiar. No son nosotras que tenemos a cambiar, son ellos lo que tienen a cambiar."

Translated to English, Deborah states that "Latina women should make a decision (in this case the decision to leave their abusive situations) and move forward. If these women stay in their abusive relationships, they (abusers) will always be there to abuse us. I now know that we (women) can get ahead without our husbands, and if our husbands want to change, and if they want to have their family, then they have to change. Its not us (women) that need to change, it them that have to stop taking advantage of us."

The essence of Deborah's experience can be described as a painful one, yet an experience that has led to success. Deborah was able to obtain accurate information, when her husband wasn't looking, and was able to make the most of change with this information. She had other options (e.g., retaliation, self-defense, etc.), options that describe a woman entrapped by her abusive experience, but was able to make the decision to leave her husband, once the appropriate information was provided.

Emily

Textural Description of Emily's Experience with Domestic Violence: Emily is a

21 year old, single Latina woman, with one child, with no religious affiliation, and has been in the United States for only three years. She too is from Mexico City and had never experienced or witnessed domestic violence until she came to the U.S. three years ago.

In her native Spanish tongue she describes the onset of her experience and provides reasons why she believes it occurred. “Empezó porque él pues quería llevarse a mi niña y yo iba con una muchacha tenía una cita y mi niña y su niño de mi prima y fuimos al doctor y él quiso y él llegó y se quiso llevar a la niña y entonces la niña como estaba jugando pues no se quería ir y entonces se la llevó a la fuerza y la subió bien enojado regañó a mi niña pues a mi niña nunca la regaña y pues yo quise y hablé con él y le dije que pues la dejara que para qué se la iba a llevar que ahorita llegábamos a la casa y no y entonces mi niña me estaba agarrando de la mano y él arrancó el carro y fue que o sea que a mí me espantó y mi niña se espantó y la soltó y se la llevó y si ahí fue que no decide ya no permitir más hasta que él nos tratara como que uno tenga miedo y llamé a la policía y se la quitaron y allí se la llevaron. Si le llamé a la policía y expliqué todo el caso porque él o sea que yo con él ya no platicábamos pero él nunca me entendía él decía esto es de este color no es de otro pues yo decía si yo subo lo primero que me va a decir es pues vete y la niña se me va a quedar entonces pues ya iba a hacer un pleito más grande entonces yo decidí llamar a la policía y la policía le quitó a mi hija y a él se lo llevaron.

In translating her spoken words, we see that Emily describes the only violent episode with her husband as occurring several months before this interview. She states that her husband arrived home after work one day and appeared to be in a rather negative mood. She was preparing to leave with one of her girlfriends to a doctor’s appointment when her husband decided that he wanted to take their daughter out with him, instead of

letting her go with the participant. She reports that an argument ensued and that they began to physically struggle for possession of their daughter. She goes on to explain that her husband was able to gain control of their daughter and left their home with their daughter in tow. Emily stated that she was able to contact the police and her husband was arrested for domestic violence and child endangerment.

Although Emily states that this was the only act of violence she had ever experienced, she also states that intense fear she experienced has negatively impacted her relationship with her husband. In her own words she explains, “Pues no nunca me pegó ni nada pero su forma de actuar como manejo y yo ya estaba allí imagínate que si él se hubiera hechado de reversa fuerte pues a mí me hubiera pasado a traer para mí si fue violencia doméstica porque eso no se hace.” Again, she explains that her husband had never been violent, but considers his behavior that day an act of domestic violence that has significantly impacted her life.

Structural Description of Emily Experience with Domestic Violence: Emily describes the impact of her experience by stating, “¿Cómo lo describiría? Pues que no esta bien que no se atengan que siempre vamos a tener miedo que los dos aquí somos iguales. Como él, como yo, valemos lo mismo y yo lo describiría a él como pues si quiere dominarnos como pisotearnos y tenerle miedo. Translated into English, Emily states that her experience with domestic violence reinforced the belief that women and men are not created equal. She stated that this inequality is not right; that her husband expected her to submit to him out of fear and that this was his way of dominating her.

Interestingly, although Emily appears to understand that the event she previously described is considered to be an act of domestic violence, she continues to demonstrate a

sense of denial that it was actually domestic violence. She explains her struggle with this by stating, “Yo llegué al grupo por una muchacha que yo le cuidaba a su bebé y ella venía a ese grupo que la mandaron por violencia doméstica a ella, a ella sí la mandaron y ella me dijo que había mucha gente que no vivió violencia doméstica nada más que iban a contar sus cosas y ella me trajo a este grupo fue que yo comencé a entrar a este grupo que ya fue como hace dos años creo pues estaban en el otro local y ya tienen dos años si dos años o más, y yo entré al grupo pero fue por esa razón que la muchacha me trajo porque yo no tenía amigos o sea yo solamente le cuidaba a sus niños y aquí está tu niño y ya decía sal y no te encierres saca a tu hija y me trajo a este grupo. Mi experiencia de violencia domestic no es como las experiencia de las mujeres que llegan a este grupo.

Translated, she states that she came to Voices of Hope by means of a friend who told her that the organization offered a forum where women could talk about their experience and that not all of the women at Voices of Hope were victims of domestic violence. She closes by stating that she came to Voices of Hope to meet other Latina women but that her experience was not as bad as that of other women at Voices of Hope.

Essence of Emily's Experience with Domestic Violence: Emily's experience appeared to be unique in several ways. First, she is the youngest of all the participants in this study. Her age, in combination with her early immigration status, as well as her age at immigration to the U.S., may contribute to her understanding and somewhat naïveté in stating that what she experienced was not domestic violence. In fact, her elevated level of denial can be viewed as being the result of her experience.

Another aspect to be considered in Emily's domestic violence experience is the fact that she has no religious affiliation influencing her interpretation of her experience.

In other words, Emily may be less likely influenced by the values and beliefs that Catholicism teaches about a woman's role in her marriage, and in greater society. Emily's experience also seems to be impacted by the lack of social support, as she describes her support as being limited to friends that she has met at Voices of Hope. In other words, Emily's experience has been influenced by the lack of social support that could provide insight into domestic violence, but instead has kept her bound to the idea that her experience was not domestic abuse.

Lastly, Emily's experience with domestic violence becomes apparent by her demonstration of empathy for her abuser. This is demonstrated in her following comment, "Pues que yo sepa no él sufrió que con la mujer que él tenía más primero la muchacha lo engañó y a base de eso él estaba como él piensa que por mi edad porque él es mayor que yo que por mi edad yo voy a hacer lo mismo y él dice que fue feo, él dice cuando él encontró a su la que era su esposa y que entonces como que él quedó que todas las mujeres le iban a hacer lo mismo pero él no sé llegaba temprano y yo siempre yo estaba en la casa y nunca me encontrado o el teléfono, antes no me dejaba el teléfono y yo ni tengo ni amigos ni nada y siempre vengo aquí a mis reuniones me gusta aquí saco todo lo que yo siento y quiero decir pero no con otra gente entonces él siempre está como con eso de que uno es más joven y lo van a engañar porque él ya lo vivió y se dió cuenta a largo de cinco años o sea que nunca le ha faltado el respeto, ni nada y entonces él dijo que de allí él tomó la decisión que él quería ayuda porque él estaba mal.

In translating Emily's words back to English we find her stating the following, "He (Emily's husband) suffered from a previous relationship with a woman who had deceived him. Based on what he thinks, given that he is older than I am, he thinks that I

will do the same thing that she did to him; that I will be unfaithful in the marriage. He says that all women are out to do the same thing and that I'm no different." Emily goes on to explain that she must earn his trust; therefore, she has made it a point to do whatever it takes to earn his trust. In fact, she states that she has begun to earn his trust because now he allows her to use the telephone and have some friends; something that was once forbidden. Emily's experience, and denial of her domestic violence experience, seems to be best explained as acts of protecting the privileges she feels she has worked so hard at earning from her husband and is fearful that these privileges can be taken away at a moment's notice.

Overall, Emily's experience with domestic violence, however unique, seems to fall in line with what is known about domestic violence. That is, Emily denies that the event meets criteria for domestic violence, is fearful of offending her husband, lives her life in a way that revolves around his mistrust of women and identifies herself with her husband, empathizing with him and excusing his violent behavior in a manner that explains it away because of something that was once done to him by another.

Francis

Textural Description of Francis' Domestic Violence Experience: Francis is a 24 year-old Latina woman from Venezuela. At the time of this interview, she reported being separated from her male Hispanic partner of eight years, and considered him her common-law husband and father of her only child. She also reported being a devout Catholic and has lived in the United States for approximately seven of those years.

Francis' experience with domestic violence is unique, in part because it involves her three year-old son and because it was exceptionally violent. For the purposes of protecting her anonymity, details depicting the actual violence inflicted upon Francis are not disclosed.

In her own words, Francis describes her experience with domestic violence by stating, "Lo ultimo que me hizo fue cuando dije que ya tenía que parar. Fue cuando yo todavía le daba pecho a mi bebé. Tengo un bebé de tres años que cumplió ahorita el 23 de noviembre, y mi bebé en esa época todavía tomaba pecho. Mi esposo estaba tomado y seguía discutiendo y diciéndome que era una pobre mujer que le estaba mariconeando a su hijo, que este no sabía que tenía una mujer tan idiota. Todo el tiempo me aterrizzaba diciéndome que no servía para nada. Todo ese tipo de cosas y yo sencillamente lo miraba y me hacía la loca, y no le decía nada sino que lo ignoraba como que no estaba ahí entonces en una de esas me jaló el bebé y yo le dije que ya parara, que yo iba a llamar a la policía, que hoy si iba a llamar a la policía. Entonces me agarró por el cuello, mi bebé empezó a llorar cuando él me lo arrancó, entonces no sé me agarró por el cuello y me tiró en la cama diciéndome que lo más fácil era darle un tiro en la cabeza para acabar con todo este problema. Y entonces me seguía apretando y apretando y el bebé lloraba y yo lo único que le dije es que le estás hacienda daño al bebé, o sea no dije estaba haciéndome daño a mí sino le estás hacienda daño al bebé y fue cuando él paró. Yo sé que si yo le decía que me estaba hacienda daño a mí él no iba a parar, pero le dije le estás hacienda daño al bebé y fue cuando el volteo a mirar al bebé, que estaba metido entre nosotros, y se paró. Y entonces agarró al bebé y se lo llevó y el bebé seguía llorando, llorando y llorando y se lo llevó y no me lo entregaba. Y yo le pedía por favor que me lo entregara

dame al bebé, que el bebé quiere estar con mama, dame el bebé y no me lo entregaba y no me lo entregaba y se metió en el cuarto de nosotros y se encerró ahí toda la noche. Y yo me quedé sentada en la puerta hasta que dejé de escuchar el bebé, y deje de llorar. Pero el bebé no paraba de llorar, y entonces me decía, y no era la primera vez que me lo hacía, que me quitaba el bebé y se encerraba en un cuarto y el bebé lloraba y lloraba y lloraba y no me lo entregaba.

Translated to English, Francis stated, that one evening her husband became extremely upset with her because she was breast-feeding her three year-old son. She states that her husband began by verbally abusing her; making statements that she was turning their son into a “mama’s boy.” She states that while she was feeding her son, her husband approached and grabbed him, taking him away from her by force, and took him into another bedroom. She states that she followed him into the bedroom, where he began to strangle her in front of their child. She states that she was pleading for her life and got him to stop choking her by telling him that he was harming their son, because he was in the room watching the abuse unfold. She then states that her husband told her that he should just end it all, in order to protect their son from her, and kill her by shooting her in the head. He then threw her out of the room, where she remained listening for her child through the locked bedroom door. When she heard her child stop crying, she asked her husband, through the door, if he would let him go; however, her husband did not respond. She states that she remained at the door until dawn, when her husband appeared and returned the child to her.

In describing her experience Francis also stated, “he had me terrorized. If I didn’t

do what he asked or I didn't behave the way he wanted, he would threaten that he would send me back to Mexico, or he wouldn't let me go to school, or he wouldn't do this or that, or I'd have to leave his house. He always told me that I would never be better off than with him, that nobody would love me like he did.

Francis also talked about a sense of responsibility that led to a failed attempt at "fixing" their relationship when they sought couples therapy. She reported that on December 10, 2008, she and her husband were meeting with their therapist when she finally realized that he was not invested in their relationship. He wouldn't tell the truth and wasn't sincere about their work in therapy. It was then that she realized that the relationship was over. Francis told her therapist that she didn't want to waste any more of the therapist's time and requested that they terminate therapy. She stated that she was done being humiliated by her husband and wanted to return to her own country. She also stated that she asked the therapist to talk with her husband and ask him for her passport, so that she and her baby could return to her country of origin. She stated that he would not provide her with her passport and stated that she felt like she was a hostage in a foreign country. She returned home only to be followed by her husband who took away her keys, took her baby and locked her out of their home. It was this event that caused her friend to call the police, which led to her husband's arrest and ultimate deportation back to Mexico.

Finally, in her description of these events, Francis stated that she felt responsible for keeping her family together, for providing her child with a father and for the failed relationship. However, she also stated that by meeting with other women at Voices of

Hope, she had come to better understand how his [her husband's] violent behavior intimidated her and caused her to feel as though something about her was defective and corrupt.

Structural Description of Francis' Domestic Violence Experience: Francis described the impact that her experience with domestic violence had on her life by stating, "Me ha impactado en todo en todo en todo en todo esto ya ahorita creo que me siento mejor un poquito no mucho pero si creo que me siento mejor porque he logrado muchas cosas sola que no sabía que podía lograr lo que mi mamá me lo repetía cantidad de veces me decía Francis tú puedes, si yo pude con cuatro niños tú puedes con uno. Tú puedes y me hacía sentir segura de que sí podía he logrado poquitas cosas no muy triunfos grandes pero han sido cositas pequeñas en la que me ha fortalecido por lo menos a conseguir medical para mi hijo seguro medico para mí le conseguí el colegio a mi bebé a pesar de que no hablo el idioma, conseguirle una vivienda algo seguro yo conseguí las cosas poco a poco programarme para los gastos, para los pagos. Pero todavía no me he curado y tengo una sensación de abandono, de pérdida aunque todavía me siento de que fui culpable porque algo no hice bien, porque no.

Translated into English Francis states "It [domestic violence] has impacted every area of my life. Today, I believe that I finally feel better about my life. I have learned a lot from my mother. She tells me that I can do it; I can do it without him. I hear her tell me that she did it with four children; therefore, I should be able to do it with one. I've been fortunate because I've been able to obtain medical insurance for my son, even though I don't speak English. I've programmed myself to learn how to pay the bills and

have learned that I can do it. However, I'm still not cured. I still have feelings of being abandoned and I still feel as though I'm at fault for the abuse. I feel like I did something wrong, like I deserved the abuse.

Francis also states that her religious beliefs, and ties to the Catholic Church have been severed because of her experience with domestic violence. In her native tongue she stated, "Yo creo que te hacen sentir culpable de que eres pequeña porque te dicen Adán pecó por culpa de Eva, porque Eva la que lo sedujo para que comiera la manzana. Y entonces te hacen sentir culpable la iglesia a mí particularmente me he dado cuenta de que me ha hecho sentir culpable por algo que yo no hice porque yo no soy Adán ni Eva, ni nada de eso y tampoco crucifiqué a Dios y tampoco no escupí, ni tampoco que pobrecito que lo crucificaron. Lo siento pero yo no soy culpable de eso. Dios perdóname pero ahorita no entonces yo dejé de ir a la iglesia también pore so porque yo ya no quiero que me hagan sentir culpable"

Translated, she states that she believes that they [Catholic clergymen] make you feel guilty; they make you feel small, because it was Eve's fault for seducing Adam and making him eat the apple. I've finally noticed that they make women feel guilty for something they did not do themselves. I didn't ask that Jesus be crucified; I'm sorry but I shouldn't be blamed for that too. God forgive me, but I haven't been back to church because I don't want them to make me feel guilty.

Essence of Francis' Domestic Violence Experience: Overall, Francis' experience with domestic violence is similar to that of the other women in study. Francis blames herself for her husband's abusive behaviors, expresses a sense of guilt for being, what she

calls, 'a bad wife' and endorses feelings of abandonment, even though she was the one who chose to escape her abusive situation. Moreover, Francis has developed a significant mistrust of religion and religious beliefs. Moreover, she has developed a significant distrust of her own ability to make the right decisions in all areas of her life. This is made clear in this statement, "Siento que puedo repetir o atraer el mismo tipo de hombre que solo me busque para que yo le de un hijo o solo me busque para eso o sea me siento que cualquier hombre me puede utilizar para que le de un niño, como que si yo fuera una fábrica de hacer bebés, y no quiero que sea así.

Translated to English, Francis states, "I feel that I am at risk for making the same mistake I made with my husband. That is, I feel that a man with the same characteristics of my husband will find me, will use me, like my husband did, to have his child, like I'm a baby factory. I just don't want it to be that way again. Again, it seems apparent that Francis' experience with domestic violence has caused her to question that which is foundational to her; it seems to have impacted her sense of self, and has led to questioning her purpose and value in life, as well and her intimate relationships. Moreover, having her mother compare her own struggles to those of Francis has had an significant impact on Francis' sense of self. In other words, her mother's experience has served a dual purpose. It has given Francis a sense of courage and strength, yet has also caused her to question herself in a way that causes her to question this courage and strength. This was captured by Francis' statement, "Yo no sé como hacer lo. Mi mama lo ha hecho, así que yo me siento como si debo poder hacerlo. Pero yo no sé si tengo la fuerza que mi madre tuvo. Translated to English, Francis stated, "I don't know how to do

[make it on her own]. My mother did it, so I feel like I should be able to do it to. But, I'm not sure I have the strength that my mother had to do it."

Gloria

Textural Description of Gloria's Domestic Violence Experience: Gloria is a 41 year-old, single, Latina woman from Mexico. She has been in the United States for 16 years and has strong Catholic religious beliefs. Gloria appears to be a fragile woman. She is small in stature and looked down toward the floor throughout the entire interview. She began the interview by describing her most recent experience with domestic violence, which occurred less than 3 months before this interview.

In Spanish she stated, "Yo me recuerdo de una golpiza que me dió él me dejó una golpiza que me dió que yo me iba a trabajar y yo sentí que me agarró del pelo. Yo caí cuando sentí él estaba arriba de mí golpeándome. Uno de mis niños, me recuerdo, gritaba y me decía que le dijera a su papa que me soltara que porque me golpeaba pero yo me acuerdo que me golpeó hasta que se cansó." Interpreted into English, Gloria states, "I remember a specific time when he [her ex-husband] beat me. I was leaving the house to go to work when he suddenly came up from behind me and grabbed me by the hair. He was on top of me, hitting me while our son was yelling at him and begging him to stop hitting me. I remember that he finally stopped hitting me when he got tired from hitting me.

Gloria also recalled another time when her husband physically abused her. Again, in her native tongue she describes the horror she felt and indignity caused by his abuse.

“No ahí fue otra que me dió. Pues dejé mi lonchera en el trabajo. Se me olvidó mi lonchera y me fui a traerla y él me espero por un lugar. De ahí me golpeó con un palo con cinturón y con la hebilla. La hebilla se soltó luego con un palo yo caí, y ahí quedé en el piso tendida de ahí esos recuerdos fue muy fuerte y me recuerdo desos cada día. Me senti como una mujer sin persona. Como una mujer de la calle, sin razón para vivir.

In interpreting the recount of her traumatic experience she states, “Yes, there was another time when I forgot my lunch at home and I called and asked if he would bring it to me. He said he would meet me at a certain place along the way. I met him there and then he began to hit me. First he began to hit me with a stick and then with a belt, then with the belt buckle. With another blow from the stick, I fell and stayed down. These memories stay with me each and every day. I felt like an empty woman; like a woman of the streets; a woman with no reason to live.”

Sadly, Gloria recounted many other events like these. She stated that her experience with domestic violence dates back to 1982, when she first experienced domestic violence. This meant that Gloria had been a victim of domestic violence for 26 years; more than a third of her life. When asked what she felt was the reasoning behind the abuse she stated, “Eran puros cellos, él era celos, puros cellos. De él yo creo que cuando el hombre es celoso pienso que el diablo los hace ver visiones a mi no me podía saludar nadie. No podían decir buenas tardes, buenos días. Si andábamos en la tienda donde quiera me agarraba a cachetadas, me golpeaba. Interpreted she states, “It was pure jealousy, it was jealousy. I believe that when a man becomes jealous the devil causes him to have visions. I was unable to say hello to anyone. No one could say good afternoon or

good morning to me. If we were in the store and someone would say hello to me, he would slap and hit me.

Structural Description of Gloria's Domestic Violence Experience: Gloria describes the context of her experience in the following statement, "A mi lo que me impactó mucho de la violencia doméstica, me duele mucho haber aguantado todo ese tiempo. Me duele mucho no haberme salido a tiempo ver sido feliz a lo mejor con otra persona. Mis hijos que vivieron, un infierno mayor, el maltratada mis hijos los golpeaba mucho en Méjico. me metía a defender a mis hijos y por defender a mis hijos era yo también golpeada. Ese hombre, yo pienso, era un hombre enfermo. Yo siempre le decía que necesita un psicólogo, porque era un enfermo.

Translated to English she states, "What impacted me the most about my experience with domestic violence is that I put up with it for so long. It hurts me so much that I didn't leave in time for me to feel happy; maybe I could have been happy with someone else. My children, who suffered through this hell, were beaten by him [her husband]. I would try to defend them, but for defending them he would beat me. That man [her husband], I think he was sick. I always told him that he needed to get help from a psychologist because he was sick.

Gloria talked about the process of leaving her husband and how this process was unique to her experience. She stated, "Yo lo que me arillaba a estar con él de que todavía vivía mi mamá, papá murió en el 97' pero mi madre murió en el 2008. Y de allí ya se acabó todo, porque lo demás era con mis padres hacerle daño a mis padres. Porque si le

iba a dejar, mis padres le iban dar mucho dolor. Pero cuando murio mis padres, ya no senti la presion para protegerlos.

Translated, she states, "What made me stay with him was that my mother was still alive at that time. My father had died in 97', but my mother didn't die until 2008. It was then that everything stopped, because if I would have left him before they died it would have caused them a great deal of emotional pain. However, all that ended when they died. When they died, I stopped feeling the need to protect them.

Gloria was able to leave her abusive husband; however, we see that the pressure to protect her parents, from the emotional pain a divorce would have caused them, kept her tied to the abuse. This speaks loudly of the cultural value that Latina's have for their families (particularly the respect and honor that Latinas have for their parents).

Lastly, Gloria briefly mentioned how her entire experience has impacted her future in this statement, "Yo pienso que queda uno lastimado; ya no se cura uno y siempre cuando uno se acuerda uno se pone triste. Dan ganas de llorar. Yo a veces mejor estar sola. Yo no tengo amigas, yo no salgo con nadie." Basically, Gloria states, "I think that a person [domestic violence victim] remains hurt forever; that there is not cure and when she [domestic violence victim] remembers the abuse she becomes depressed. She begins to want to cry. For me, I would rather be alone. I don't have any friends. I don't go out anymore. I have no one."

Essence of Gloria's Domestic Violence Experience: Gloria has, by her own account, lived a horrific life that has been filled with physical, emotional and

psychological pain. She attests to living a life full of regret; allowing her husband to determine how she interacted in the world. Gloria stated that her husband was mentally ill and that jealousy described their marriage. Not unlike the other women in this study, Gloria continued to endure the abuse because of the values instilled by her culture and religious beliefs. You see, Gloria also reported that the love for her parents, and desire to safeguard them from the emotional pain of a divorce, kept her trapped in her abusive relationship. For Gloria to have endured years of abuse in order to protect her mother and father from the pain of a divorce truly captures the intensity of this cultural value and the martyr-like mentality that it fosters in these Latina women. Interestingly, it wasn't until the death of both of her parents that she broke free from the chains that kept her imprisoned to a life of pain and suffering.

Although Gloria now has physically moved beyond her abusive experience, she truly believes that she remains a woman eternally damaged, never to be whole again. Gloria stated that she felt as though she had failed to protect her children. According to Gloria, this was worse than any sin that a woman has ever committed. In her words, "Para mi, me siento que soy una mama tirada. Que no podia dar a mis hijos lo que necesitaron. Es peor de cualquiera pecado cometido por mujer".

Group Descriptions

Group Textual Description: Data analysis revealed three composite textural themes. These themes, including quotes and invariant constituents are described in narrative form as well as in *Table 1*. The three themes were derived from the participant's descriptions of their experience with domestic violence.

Isolation/Depression

The women of this study endorsed feelings of isolation and depression. All of the women in this study stated that the first thing they noticed after coming to Voices of Hope was that they weren't alone in their depression; that they were not alone anymore. They reported feeling isolated from the world. "Being in an abusive relationship was a lonely place," one woman said. Another woman said, "Isolation can be physical and emotional and in my case it was both." Participants described feeling isolated from family and friends. In some cases this separation was both a physical and an emotional one and in others it was an emotional distance from family, who either didn't believe the victim's account of abuse or blamed the victim for the abuse.

The isolation and depression was perceived as being caused by a failure in being a good Latina woman. The apparent violation of cultural norms that these women valued isolated them even further and facilitated a dark depression that was described as a soul piercing sadness and flaw.

Fear

"Para mi, yo tenia mucha tema de el. Yo crea que el me iba a matar. Que el me iba poner en el carcel por no aser le caso." The women of this study made several comments like the one described above. The statement above says, "For me, I was in a lot of fear. I believed that he was going to kill me. I believed that he was going to have me sent to jail for not listening to him." Another participant stated, "Yo no pienso que es una relación buena, pero generalmente Latinas trata de tener la mejor relación posible porque muchos tienen miedo del divorcio. Latinas permanecerá en sus relaciones, quizá con

problemas, con desconfianza, y con celos pero permanecen porque el tienen miedo que ese divorcio los simbolizará como mujeres falladas in la cultura Latina.” Translated to English, “Well, I don’t think that it’s a good relationship, but usually Latinas try to have the best relationship possible because many are afraid of divorce. Latinas will stay in their relationships, maybe with problems, with distrust, and with jealousy but they stay because they are afraid that divorce symbolizes a failed woman in Latin culture.”

Characterological Self-Hate/Self-Blame

Throughout each of the interviews, the majority of these women made statements that described the impact that domestic violence had on their self-perception and esteem. One woman stated, “Me ha impactado toda la vida. Yo me siento que la manera que yo me veo es malo. Mi auto estima es baja. Yo lo hizo a mí. Mi percepción de yo mismo ha bajado. Yo me quería pero ahora puedo ni pienso en yo mismo como una persona buena.” Translated to English, “I feel that the way I see myself is bad. My self-esteem is low. I did this to myself. My perception of myself has gone down. I used to like myself but now I can't even think of myself as a good person. I hate myself. I know I’m a bad woman” Each of these women described blaming themselves for their abuse. The majority felt like they had failed and failed at everything that they perceived as meaningful in their lives. They described their perceived failures at characterological flaws that could never change. They described a sense of ultimate hopelessness for becoming whole again; however, these women did seem to find some sense of comfort knowing that they shared the same flaw between them and were not alone with the pain anymore.

Composite Structural Descriptions

Data analysis revealed three composite structural themes. These themes, including quotes and invariant constituents, are described in narrative form as well as in *Table 2*.

The three themes were derived from the information that the participant's provided regarding the abuse in the context of life as a Latina immigrant in the United States.

Gender Inequality

The women in this study recognized the lack of equality in their intimate relationships and associated this with factors related to Latino culture and religious beliefs.

Interviewees spontaneously offered the word "machismo" in describing role norms in their countries of origin and enumerated the contrasts they had encountered in gender role expectations in the U.S., where the woman is an economic partner and may make important domestic decisions ("la mujer manda"). Male domination, (machismo) was cited by all the women in this study. Some women recognized it as a weakness in their husband's and called it an "illness" yet others identified as their husband's need to be in control, to dominate every aspect of their lives because it was what was expected of him. One woman stated, "El necesita ser hombre macho. Tiene gana para ser el rey de toda mi vida. Tiene que ser el mayor y si no, se ase muy mal y lo quita en mi. Translated to English this woman stated, "He has this need to be macho; a need to be the king of my life. He needs to be the major aspect of my life, if not he turns bad and takes it out on me."

Table 1

Composite Themes and Invariant Constituents

Theme	Invariant Constituents	Sample Quotes (Translated)
Isolation/Depression	<p>Discouraged from spending time with friends or family.</p> <p>Told that they could not talk to friends or family.</p> <p>Staying away from friends and family so they do not know about the abuse.</p> <p>Not spending time with others to avoid having to explain their injuries.</p>	<p>He forced me to stay at home.</p> <p>I couldn't even talk to neighbors.</p> <p>I would cry by myself.</p> <p>He would take the phone with him so I couldn't to anyone.</p>
Fear	<p>Obeying their husbands/partners for fear of being beaten.</p> <p>Being abused for protecting their children.</p> <p>Afraid to say hello to anyone because of the threat of being abused.</p>	<p>I had to do it all because I was afraid of him.</p> <p>I couldn't even protect my kids for fear of being beaten.</p> <p>I was afraid to say hi to anyone because he would beat me.</p>
Self-Blame	<p>Feeling like it was their fault.</p> <p>Feeling like they should know better.</p> <p>Feeling ashamed for causing the abuse.</p> <p>Feeling like family would blame them for the abuse.</p>	<p>I know it was my fault.</p> <p>My mom blamed me when I left him.</p>

Interestingly, the participants in this study demonstrated an accurate assessment of the cultural influences that have shaped and impacted their experience with domestic violence. In other words, each of the immigrant Latinas in this study understood the circumstances of her intimate relationship not solely as a unique experience rooted in individual characteristics but more as a collective experience originating from systematic gender inequity.

Immigration Status

There are many social and economic factors that create barriers for immigrant battered women. For example, for most immigrant women, their only means of support is an abusive husband and they may lack alternative support networks, such as extended families, in their new country. Leaving her husband for a safer environment may alternately mean losing not only his financial support and her possessions, but also the extended family or community that can provide her with the support needed to obtain work (Erez, 2000). Economic barriers are not the only ones that immigrant women face. Immigrant women, unlike citizens, often may not legally work and face a constant threat of deportation by their abuser (Narayan, 1995; Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 1998). Abusers of immigrant women often use immigration-related threats to assert power and control over their spouse or intimate partner. The abuser, if he is a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident, typically uses this power to threaten to have the victim deported by reporting her undocumented status to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), threatens to revoke residency sponsorship, or refuses to file necessary immigration petitions that would provide the victim with lawful status in the U.S.. Fear of deportation is a very powerful tool used by abusers to prevent battered immigrant women from seeking help

and to keep them in violent relationships.

The majority of the women in this study stated that their immigration status was always a tool that provided the abusers with power over them. They were constantly reminded that jail or deportation was only one mistake away and were made to believe that their abuser was always on the verge of calling the authorities. Moreover, these women stated that calling the police for help was hardly an option.

Additionally, for some immigrant women, coming to the United States has provided alternative ways of thinking about gender roles and power dynamics. However, for these women being an immigrant in a progressive country was not considered to be an advantage. These women found themselves in a socially progressive environment that supports the opinions of women and encourages them to use their knowledge to challenge their partners and families. However, given their poor immediate social support network (i.e., the absence of relatives and friends), and misinformation about domestic violence and immigration laws, kept these women captive and trapped in their abusive relationships.

Family/Clergy Response

Communities respond to some women's efforts to seek safety by shunning them or by putting pressure on them to remain in the marriage. Divorce is such a stigma in some Latin communities that a woman may never be able to remarry within her community once she has left her abuser. If she does leave, she is often held responsible for the end of the marriage even if she was the victim of violence. Her family of origin may or may not accept her back, because such an act may bring disgrace to the entire

family (Supriya, 1996; Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996). In addition, the presence of relatives who witness the violence may not deter the batterer, as family members may ignore or condone the violence.

Although the Catholic Church teaches that violence against another person is wrong, several women in this study reported that these teachings were not what they experienced from their interactions with the church. These women described various instances where clergy suggested for them to go home, pray for your husband, and try to help them change. One woman specifically said, “Un sacerdote me dijo regresar a casa, resuelvo lo que hago mal, oro y lo fijo para que mi marido parará golpearme.” Translated into English, she stated, “One priest told me to go home, figure out what I'm doing wrong, pray and fix it so that my husband will stop beating me.”

Interestingly, although several of these women described similar interactions with clergy members, these women continue to demonstrate a passionate value for their religious beliefs. To some extent, they inherently continue to believe that personal sacrifice will pave the way toward being a woman worthy of God's love.

Table 2

Themes	Invariant Constituents	Sample Quotes (Translated)
Gender Inequality	Religious beliefs keep men above women. Women subservient to men. Women are responsible for original sin.	My religion taught that I'm supposed obey him. He is above me. It is our fault that men are sinners.
Immigration Status	Fear of being deported. Unable to speak English. Concern of breaking the law.	I thought he would send me back to Mexico. He told me if I called the police I would be deported.
Family/Clergy Responses	Lack of support from family. Priests say go back and work it out. Priests say it's the woman's fault. Family says its woman's responsibility to keep the family together.	My mother didn't believe me. The priest made me believe it that it was my fault. It's my responsibility to tend to my family.

The Essence of Domestic Violence

Group Essence of Domestic Violence: Six themes were identified via analysis of the interview protocol and interview transcriptions (see Tables 1 and 2). The participants in this study revealed a range of textual and structural variables that influence Latina women's understanding of, and response to, their experience with domestic violence. These had to do with their personal history and experience with domestic violence, their experience and belief about Latino men, their cultural and religious values and their overall experience as immigrants in the United States, as well as the struggles of basic survival that often accompany immigrant status in this country. Many of these factors seemed to contribute to their reluctance to expose the violence to others and contributed to an overall perception of domestic violence as something to endure, rather than escape. Many of these women emphasized that violence was a common occurrence in their native country, both inside and outside the home, and is an acceptable practice that often goes without castigation for the perpetrator and without intervention for the victim.

The impact that domestic violence has had on the lives of these women is immense. The women in this study reported several areas in which life had changed because of their experience. For instance, one woman stated that after her husband threatened to report her to the Department of Immigration, she literally lost the ability to make her own decisions; relying on her husband to make all of the decisions regardless of the effect it may have had on her personal life. She said that life for her focused on her survival in a foreign country where she couldn't reach out for help because she didn't speak English. She stated that she lived in constant fear of being sent to jail for not "obeying my husband." He made me believe that he could have me sent to jail, or back to

Mexico, if I told anyone about the abuse."

The women of this study have truly been imprisoned by their abusive perpetrators and by their immigrant status in the U.S. However, the seven women in this study were able to connect with the system, primarily through the help of at least one English speaking friend. This friend was able to communicate the truth about domestic violence to these women and point them in the direction of support for Latina women, provided by Voices of Hope. The majority of these women stated that Voice of Hope provided truth about domestic violence, and resources that they needed in order to leave their abusive relationships (food, shelter, and a place where they felt understood).

Lastly, the women in this study voiced their agreement to participate in this study because they understood the importance of communicating the help available to other Latina victims of domestic violence. They wanted their stories told, with the hope that their stories would encourage other women to seek help and change the pattern of abuse that has long held them back and kept them locked in a small world surrounded by their cultural, religious and gender-related values and pressures that favor male dominance in their lives.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to answer the following research questions and these are addressed in the following section:

- 1) How do Latina women of this study interpret their domestic violence experiences?
- 2) How does culture influence the meanings that participants of this study place on their experience with domestic violence?
- 3) How do the findings from the lived experiences of the women of this study compare to previous findings from research with Latina domestic violence victims?
- 4) What implications do the meanings of the lived experience of the domestic violence victims in this study present for the treatment of domestic violence for Latina women in the U.S.?

How do Latina Women of this Study interpret their Domestic Violence Experience?

The subjective accounts of domestic violence from the Latina women of this study confirm the emotional and psychological effects that women experience in both the short and long term. For example, the women in this study talked about the experience of isolation, personal fear, fear of deportation, the blow to their self worth and esteem, and described these as persistent consequences of being in and leaving their abusive situations. Many of these women's experiences continued beyond the end of the abusive relationships. For instance, one woman reported that she had lost her sense of confidence in choosing positive relationships and feared entering into future relationships. These experiences were influenced by the lack of family, social and institutional support, leading to the continued difficulties that these women experienced on a day-to-day basis.

Specifically, many of the women in this study identified the lack of support from both their families and their religious institutions, as detrimental to their experience with domestic violence. The participant's accounts highlight the importance of others' recognition of their domestic violence situation and indicate the necessity of understanding violence against women in a societal and institutional context which normalizes and tolerates violence.

In line with previous research findings (Denham, et al., 2010), the women of this study reported limited social support systems available after they disclosed their abuse, a finding that is unique to Latina victims of domestic violence. In other words, the concept of familismo, and the support it typically offers for Latina women who are not victims of domestic violence, holds true (Edelson, Hokoda & Ramos-Lira (2007); however, this support did not appear to hold true for the women who disclosed their abusive situations to their families. Familismo painfully lost its meaning, as these women found themselves unsupported by the family they once valued. In fact, several women in this study spoke about the negative feelings they developed toward their family. Specifically, some of the women described feeling isolated and alone when their families did not believe or did not support their decision to leave their abusive relationships; a finding often found in the literature (Adams et al., 2005; Anderson et al., 2008; Garcia et al., 2004). Importantly, because divorce is viewed so negatively in Latin communities, these women may or may not be accepted back by their families because such an act is often considered to be disgraceful to the entire family (Supriya, 1996; Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996). Moreover, because divorce has such a negative stigma in the Catholic Church, the women of this

study may never be able to re-marry within their religious community once they leave their abuser.

Many of the women in this study emphasized that violence was a common occurrence in their native country. Both inside and outside the home, the practice of domestic violence is acceptable and often goes without castigation for the perpetrator and without intervention for the victim. One woman described how the police in Mexico often bring victims of domestic violence back to their abusers; often allowing the abuser to continue without any form of castigation. Again, here the lack of social support systems that can act to protect Latina women from abuse (e.g., laws prohibiting domestic violence, domestic violence shelters, mental health services for domestic violence victims) contributed to early experiences with domestic violence for some of these women. In fact, four of the women specifically talked about identifying with their mothers in Mexico, and many talked about being taught that women are supposed to suffer more than men, that men are superior to women, and that it is their responsibility to keep their husbands happy no matter the costs.

How does culture influence the meanings that participants of this study place on their experience with domestic violence?

Although culture clearly permeated the entire interview, certain cultural values stood out from the women's accounts of their experiences with domestic violence. To begin with, the ineffective protection in their native countries, as well as the failure to address the value of a woman's family and societal role, were aspects of these women's social support systems that perpetuated the abusive situation. Furthermore, these systems also complicated these women's circumstances, making it much more likely that they

would continue to endure the misery involved in their abusive relationships. In fact, several of the women in this study described support systems that responded to their efforts to seek safety by shunning them or by putting pressure on them to remain in the marriage.

Unfortunately many of these systems of support perpetuated practices or views that reinforced the tactics of these women's experiences with domestic violence. Specifically, by normalizing violence against Latina women and supporting the view that women carry the responsibility for their relationships and for keeping their families together, these systems of support exacerbated these women's negative experiences with domestic violence. The women's systems of support responded by shunning them or by putting pressure on them to remain in the marriage.

The women of this study acknowledged and spoke of specific socio-cultural pressures that define their experience with domestic violence; 1) male domination over every aspect of their lives, 2) lack of support from family, friends or clergy, and 3) a true sense of fear and loneliness that keeps these Latina women trapped in their abusive relationships. Overall, what these women have provided is information regarding the nature of domestic violence for a Latina woman and how it affects her mental health, self esteem, current relationships with friends and family and other future relationships.

The women in this study found that being in an abusive relationship not only led to difficulties in their personal lives but they also found that it caused significant difficulty in their family, community and religious lives. The difficulties in their relationships led to less self-esteem, lack of social support and feelings of family abandonment. Generally these difficulties led these women to seek help from Voices of

Hope. They wanted to feel better about themselves but the majority of these women continued to live with their abusers for quite some time after seeking help. The women who remained in their abusive relationships, reported staying with their abusive partners because of societal and cultural forces, as well as the specific need to protect their children and their families. They also stated that their commitment and loyalty to their family, and fear of being deported kept them locked in the abusive relationship. In fact, many of the women stated that their abusers made them believe that they would be deported if they reported the abuse to authorities. In fact, one study of Latina immigrants in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area found that 21.7% of the battered immigrant women stated their fear of being reported to immigration authorities by their abusers as their primary reason for remaining in an abusive relationship (Dutton, Orloff & Aguilar Hass, 2000).

How do the findings from the lived experiences of the women of this study compare to previous findings from research with Latina domestic violence victims?

Many of the responses that describe the lived experiences of the women in this study are supported throughout the literature. For example, the women of this study provided descriptions of their abusive experience, and resulting feelings of isolation, depression, self-blame and fear. Previous researchers, investigating the lived experiences of domestic violence in Latina women, have found similar results (Adams et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2000; Barnett et al, 2001; Farnsworth 2005).

Although previous research studies have not focused on Latina women in the Midwest, similar findings with Latina women have been found in both the East and West

coasts (Bauer, Rodriguez, & Perez-Stable, 2000; Bauer, Rodriguez & Quiroga, 2000; Denham et al., 2010; Jasinski et al., 2001; West et al., 2008). Specifically, these women described leaving their abusive relationships as an act of desperation; an attempt to end the isolation and depression associated with their abuse. One woman described the act of leaving her abusive relationship as an act of fear and desperation, in order to begin a new life in a foreign country; providing evidence that findings from previous research on the coasts can be generalized to the Mid-West sample of the current study.

Although one might expect that the domestic violence experience of these Latina women may differ from that of non-Latina women, the women in this study described the patterns of their abuse in a way that supports Walker's (1979) Cycle of Violence theory. The women in this study described their relationship as initially being okay, and interactions typically being positive; however, once real life issues began to set in, often exacerbated by migration to the United States, tension between the couple began and their partners began to act out violently. Their abusive partners would then blame them for his behavior, often exacerbated by the lack of family, church and community support. Then they described their abuser feeling remorseful and guilty for his actions; yet, none of the women reported their abuser as taking full responsibility for his actions; another behavior that Walker described in her Cycle of Violence Theory. Fortunately, the majority of the women in this study chose to leave their abusive relationships before the abuse escalated in frequency and intensity, the final stage of Walker's (1979) Cycle of Violence Theory. While the cycle of abuse may be similar to non-Latinas, the reasons to stay in the relationship may not only include self-preservation, but also cultural and religious influences that are more culturally oriented.

Overall, findings of the current study contribute new knowledge to the area of domestic violence by providing more evidence and emphasis to the idea that Latina women are trapped by their culture, as well as their partner in the abusive relationship.

What implications do the meanings of the lived experience of the domestic violence victims in this study present for future research and for the treatment of domestic violence in Latina women in the U.S.?

Implications for Future Domestic Violence Research

The material and social consequences for women, being re-housed, losing their possessions and starting a new life in a new country, are immense. This highlights the need for practical and financial support for Latina women as they leave their abusive relationships. It also highlights the importance of providing effective legal support for minorities in the U.S., providing increased protection from their perpetrators, allowing them the security to leave their perpetrator or removing the perpetrator from the home and securing the family's protection. For the women in this study, making contact with Voices of Hope provided them with education, support and a heightened awareness of the issues related to domestic violence. Voices of Hope served to protect these women, and their families, from further abuse by providing a safe environment where these women could be heard and understood by others who share similar experiences. Moreover, the social support provided by Voices of Hope validated the women's experiences, combated their feelings of isolation and abandonment, and educated them about the clash of cultural values and abuse. Providing resources into research projects aimed at developing organizations like Voices of Hope, seems to be a logical step in providing useful

resources for Latina victims of domestic violence.

The women in this study attempted various methods to maximize their safety in a foreign country. These participants attempted to maximize safety, even if it meant staying with the abuser, and included actions that tried to challenge as well as appease the perpetrator. The findings of this study clearly identify the ways in which institutions and formal networks are active in supporting or challenging the abuse and had a significant impact on the way that participants experienced domestic violence. Specifically, family and religious resources responded to these women in ways that promote trying to work it out and stay in their abusive relationships. Hence, the responsibility of stopping the abuse was overwhelmingly on the women, and not on the abuser. This being said, it seems logical that educating family, friends, clergy etc. about the importance of appropriate support, would provide these women with the strength to leave their abusive relationships safely and would place the pressure to stop the abuse back onto the abuser, where it belongs. In other words, there is a need for the dissemination of effective messages to family, friends, and to clergy members (primarily of the Catholic Church) about the unacceptability of domestic violence and the importance of supporting a women's right to leave the abusive relationship.

Lastly, the more we understand the unique experiences of Latina victims of domestic violence the better we can serve this population. Of particular interest should be the impact that cultural values, such as; machismo, marianismo and familismo, continue to have on Latina victims of domestic violence. Understanding the phenomenon of domestic violence in Latina women will allow researchers and clinicians to develop appropriate programs and culturally relevant or attuned interventions and approaches.

Increasing our knowledge of domestic violence, and its impact on women of color, by continuing research in this area, has the potential of enhancing the lives of woman across our nation and its borders.

The findings from the current project provide an avenue for future culturally-accurate research. Research that focuses on the prevention of domestic violence, via a culturally sensitive intervention, that promotes the positive aspects of machismo, marianismo, and familismo as cultural values that need not be denounced. Such a project has the potential to change the lives of many women who remain victims of domestic violence.

Implications for Clinical Practice

According to Jasinski (1998), Hispanic women report some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the United States. As domestic violence shelters, hotlines, and other services continue to increase in and around the country, mental health providers continue to face the challenge of providing culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate services to victims of domestic violence. One of the greatest challenges is finding ways to meet the unique needs that women of diverse cultural backgrounds present; moreover, the needs that Latina victims of domestic violence present. This being said, the current study provides an insight into the unique perspectives that Latina women have regarding their experience with domestic violence. It provides an inside look into the challenges that these women face when social support systems fail them and are left without the support that other non-Latina woman commonly have in the United States (e.g., family, church, friends, etc.).

The women of this study often commented on the need for bi-lingual counselors

in the Midwest that have a deeper understanding and awareness of Latino culture. Specifically, the women of this study reflected the need for both culturally and linguistically sensitive therapists that has often been noted in the literature (Bernal & Castro, 1994; Santiago-Rivera, 1995). Although the women of this study had sought treatment at Voices of Hope, treatment involved group activities with minimal individual counseling. What the women of this study provided was insight into the need for individual counseling focused on providing resources of support (e.g., financial, housing, legal support), education (e.g., learning English), and self-empowerment. The voices of these women underscore the need for mental health providers to make appropriate support services available, in Spanish, to Latina women and to help Latina women build their own social networks. This can be done by supporting a Latina woman's decision to leave her abusive relationship, provide her with the support of other Latina women that can empower her, and provide her with a sense of belonging, especially for those women who are less acculturated to U.S. society and western values. It is important to note, that for many Latina women, new to the U.S., providing them with access to a domestic violence shelter may exacerbate their feelings of isolation; therefore, it is important for mental health providers to understand the importance of providing the Latina victim with support tailored in a way that will alleviate her distress while decreasing her feelings of isolation. Providing her with Spanish speaking staff support can do this, however, if Spanish-speaking staff are not available, being mindful of a few simple Spanish phrases may surprisingly provide her with a sense of understanding and belonging.

Lastly, the women of this study provided insight into the dynamic interplay between culture, religion, immigration status and the experience of domestic violence. As

a culturally sensitive mental health professional, the information provided by these women is invaluable. These women were willing to share their experiences knowing that the goal was to provide insight into their world of domestic violence so as to provide a better understanding and future for other Latina women like them and for the mental health providers that are responsible for providing culturally sensitive and accurate therapy to those women. It would be a disservice not to consider the value that this study has provided in insight to the unique perspective of the Latina victims of domestic violence.

Limitations

Although this information was collected with the purpose of gaining insight into the experience of domestic violence in Latina women, it is a qualitative study, with inherent limitations on generalizability. For instance, the findings of this study are based on a small sample of Latina women and thus, may not be representative of the Latino community in Lincoln, Nebraska, or elsewhere. Additionally, the majority of participants in this study were Mexican, as are the majority of Latinos in Lincoln, Nebraska, and in the United States; however, participants were also from other countries in Central and South America, limiting the generalizability of these findings to Latina women from these other countries as well.

Another limitation of this study, that may have impacted its conclusions, involves the relationship of the author with the participants. During the initial presentation of this study, the author shared his own experience with the participants of this study, with the intent of creating an environment in which these women felt able and comfortable to share their domestic violence experiences with this author. In doing so, although unlikely,

this may have influenced the participants' responses because they may have presumed the author's opinions on the topic of domestic violence. Additionally, it was noted that the women in this study did not address the having children at home as a source preventing them from leaving their abusive relationships. This may have been related to contextual factors involved in the method used to interview participants, or may have been related to participant's bias to protect the researcher from information closing related to his own experience with domestic violence.

Despite these limitations, the data presented in this study make known the need to better understand the unique cultural factors that influence domestic violence in Latina women. Moreover, the data presented in this study help to identify the factors unique to Latina victims of domestic violence, with the hope of bridging the gap that exists in the current literature regarding this population.

Closing Comments

The process that I have undergone to plan this study, recruit participants, elicit each of these women's stories and analyze/interpret the data has been an extremely positive experience for me. The most impressive part of the whole process was the group of women who were willing to share their experiences of domestic violence with me. All of the women agreed to participate in this study because they believed that it would help educate others about domestic violence in Latinas and were hopeful that their participation could lead to the future prevention of domestic violence in other Latinas.

The women of this study have been through varying levels of abuse, yet all were still willing to openly talk about their experience and allowed themselves to be vulnerable

with this investigator, a complete stranger. These women allowed themselves to be in a situation where they were asked to recount difficult experiences, all for the benefit of possible change in the future.

Thanks to these women, we now have a better understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence in Latina women. I also gained a better appreciation and understanding of the difficulty involved in conducting qualitative research. Specifically, I found myself having to be acutely aware of my role as a researcher, and not their counselor. At times I found myself drawn into the participant's experience and wanted to provide some form of therapeutic response; yet was able to remind myself of my role as the researcher.

Every part of me wishes these women the best in their lives. I will forever be grateful for their participation and hope that these research findings make a difference in at least the life of one Latina woman in the United States.

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Appendix A

The Battered Woman Experience: A Phenomenological Study

Exploring the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims

Participant Recruitment Script

Participant Recruitment Script

I have learned of a potential opportunity for you to participate in a research study that is being conducted by a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His name is Jaime Gonzalez and he has asked that I let you know that he will be here (specify date) to talk more about the purpose of the study and answer any questions you may have. He also wants you to know that participation in this study is completely and fully voluntary and choosing not to participate in this study will not impact any services you receive from our agency (Voices of Hope). Do not feel obligated to participate, but if you are interested in participating please be sure to visit with him when he visits us. Thank you.

Appendix B

The Battered Woman Experience: A Phenomenological Study

Exploring the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims

Client Informed Consent Form

Client Informed Consent Form

Purpose of the Research:

My name is Jaime Gonzalez and I am a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am conducting a research study that will explore participant's experiences with domestic violence. Specifically, the context of domestic violence and its impact on current and future personal relationships will be explored as it contributes to the understanding and meaning of what is important when building relationships. You have been invited to participate because you are a client of Voices of Hope, have personally experienced domestic violence, are a Latina and are at least 19 years of age or older.

Procedures:

As part of this study, you will be asked to participate by agreeing to be interviewed by Jaime Gonzalez. The interview will take place in the offices at Voices of Hope or for your convenience, at the University of Nebraska Counseling Psychology Clinic. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire requesting demographic information that will take you approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The interview will last approximately one hour. In this interview, you will be asked to discuss your experience(s) with domestic violence and the meanings you have placed on this experience(s). Specifically, you will be asked to discuss your perceptions of your domestic violence experience(s) and how this experience(s) have impacted your life. Examples of the questions you will be asked are: "How would you describe your experience with domestic violence?" and "How would you describe the impact that domestic violence has had on your family?" The interview will be audio taped with your permission. You will have the opportunity to review the entire transcript in order to make suggestions, add comments, or express concerns with the content expressed in the interview.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, you may or may not experience discomfort; however, the researcher can offer immediate assistance if needed and/or make an appropriate referral.

Benefits:

You may find that your participation in this research project increases your knowledge and awareness of your experiences with domestic violence, and that information gained from this study may enhance your experiences with Voices of Hope. Results from this

study will be used to enhance the current literature on domestic violence, and the personal meanings that domestic violence victims place on their experiences. This study may also provide further insight into ways of improving current domestic violence therapy models and potentially help future victims of domestic violence.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during the study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Your specific responses to the interview questions will not be shared with Voices of Hope or any other agency. Following transcription of the interviews, audiotapes will be completely erased and destroyed. The transcriptionists and analysis will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's personal office and will only be seen by the researcher during the study and for five years after the study is complete. When writing the report, pseudonyms will be used to protect confidentiality and any descriptions will be written in an unidentifiable manner. The information obtained in this study may become published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported in a way that preserves your anonymity.

Compensation:

You will receive a small, monetary token of appreciation for your time spent participating in this study (\$25).

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

If you should have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the researcher, or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965. You may also contact the researcher at (760) 953-8016 or the researcher's supervisor Dr. Michael J. Scheel at (402) 472-0573.

Freedom to Withdrawal:

At any time, you are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdrawal at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Voices of Hope. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name and phone number of investigators:

Jaime Gonzalez, M.S., Principle Investigator

Cell: (760) 953-8016

Michael J. Scheel, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

Office: (402) 472-0573

Appendix C

The Battered Woman Experience: A Phenomenological Study

Exploring the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims

Consent to Record

Consent to Record

To ensure the quality and effectiveness of the study, the interview will be audio taped. Any identifying information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to label the tapes to ensure confidentiality. Following transcription of the interviews, audiotapes will be erased and destroyed. Transcriptions and analysis will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's personal office and will only be seen by the researcher during the study and for five years after the study is complete.

I hereby give consent to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the researcher of this study to audiotape my interview. I understand that I may withdrawal my consent at any time without fear of adversely affecting my relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Voices of Hope.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Participant

Date

Name and phone number of investigators:

Jaime Gonzalez, M.S., Principal Investigator

Cell (760) 953-8016

Michael J. Scheel, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator
0572

Office: (402) 472-

Appendix D

The Battered Woman Experience: A Phenomenological Study

Exploring the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____

Age: _____

DOB: _____

Marital Status:

_____ Single

_____ Married

_____ Separated

_____ Divorced

_____ Widowed

_____ Cohabiting (living together)

Religious Affiliation: (Please specify) _____

Thank you!

Appendix E
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name:

Date:

Hello. My name is Jaime Gonzalez and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and I am the primary investigator for this study. I would first like to thank you for taking time to participate in this study. I realize that this topic of this study can be sensitive for some; therefore, I ask that you please feel free to let me know if at any time you wish to either take a break or withdrawal from the interview. Here is the informed consent form. I will go over it with you and ask that you sign and date it afterwards. Do you have any questions?

I will be recording and transcribing our interview today. This is the consent to record form. It basically states that you give me permission to record and transcribe our interview. Please sign and date this form. Do you have any questions?

As you already know, this study is investigating the lives of Latina women and their experience with domestic violence.

Current Experience

I know that this may be a bit painful, but could you describe for me the most recent situation in which you experienced domestic violence?

How long ago was this?

How would you describe its impact on you?

How would you describe the process you took in getting help for your experience with domestic violence?

What influenced your decision to get help for your experience with domestic violence?

Domestic Violence Background

How would describe overall your experience with domestic violence?

When was the first time you experienced domestic violence?

Can you please describe your view of that experience?

How would you describe the impact this experience had on your life?

How would you describe the impact it had on your family (i.e., children, mother, father, etc.)?

In what ways would you say that it changed your perspective on your relationship and other intimate relationships?

In what ways would you say that it influenced your views on your personal safety?

In what ways would you say that it impacted your connection with your family of origin?

Future Outlook

In what way would you say that domestic violence has impacted your view of the future?

How would you describe your future and the future of your children with regard to intimate relationships?

Domestic Violence and Culture

How would you describe the influence of being a Latina woman on your experience with domestic violence?

In what way would you say that your culture has impacted your experience with domestic violence?

How might your experience with domestic violence have differed if you were not a Latina?

In what way would you say your values and beliefs influence your experience with domestic violence?

In what way would you say that your religious beliefs influence your experience with domestic violence?

Again, I would like to thank you for taking the time to openly express your views and experiences of domestic violence with me today.

Appendix F
Recruitment Flyer

Recruitment Flyer

ATTENTION LATINA WOMEN!!

Help mental health professionals gain a better understanding of Domestic Violence. If you are a Latina woman who has experienced violence in an intimate relationship, and are willing to talk about it, I am looking forward to meeting with you.

EARN \$25 FOR A 1hr. INTERVIEW!!**Contact:****Jaime Gonzalez, M.S., PLMHP****(Primary Investigator)****Phone: (760) 953-8016****Email: jgonza10@bigred.unl.edu**