

AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

by

MELISSA ANNE MORSE

(Under the direction of Patricia Bell-Scott)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to explore women's perceptions and experiences of emotional abuse. The participants were seven women who were between the ages of 30-45 and who had experienced no or infrequent physical abuse. Using a semi-structured interview format the following issues were explored: women's perceptions of emotional abuse, how they came to define actions as abusive, how frequently these acts occurred, and what impact these experiences had on the women and their relationships. Narrative analysis was the principal analytical strategy. The findings indicated that emotional abuse in the family of origin, emotional abuse in more than one relationship, and hasty commitment to relationships were hallmarks of women entering emotionally abusive relationships. Women's self perception was negatively affected by the emotional abuse and made the prospect of leaving more difficult. Women's awareness of emotional abuse often did not occur until the relationship was nearing an end. Books, friends, family, and others helped the women separate from the relationship.

INDEX WORDS: Emotional Abuse, Psychological Abuse,
Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse

AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

by

MELISSA ANNE MORSE

B.A., The University of Minnesota, 1986

M.S., The University of Georgia, 1993

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GA

2003

© 2003

Melissa Anne Morse

All Rights Reserved

AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

by

MELISSA ANNE MORSE

Major Professor: Patricia Bell-Scott

Committee: Mick Coleman
Lily McNair
Mary Erlanger

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2003

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have been supportive throughout this process. My co-workers have been very supportive and I am grateful for it. Several people went “above and beyond the call of duty.” Thanks to Charlie Cook for the good-natured ribbing that showed me he cared, for his efforts to help improve my perspective about the process, and his general encouragement. Tim Hinkle was helpful with recruitment, discussions that gave me insight, and distracted me with music and art. John Lee kept my sense of humor going and our discussions provided food for thought. He also provided tons of encouragement. Jane Peach for absolutely everything but especially for being, at times, more excited about this project than I was—particularly when my energy was ebbing. It helped me get excited all over again. Thanks for believing in me!

Chris and Kathy had a foot in both camps. Many others checked in regularly about how I was holding up and expressed words of encouragement.

To my family---thanks for the support and continued encouragement throughout a very long decade. Thanks to Shelley Smith for the gift of your time and energy that helped me gain energy and mental space in preparation for this work. Thanks to Jenny Manders who has been a real friend through good and difficult times. Thanks for your belief in me and continued support. I love and value you very much. Thanks to Char Anderson who has been with me through thick and thin and tells me the hard stuff when I need to hear it. You predicted this long ago and I love and value beyond words.

I would like to thank Mick Coleman, Lily McNair, and Mary Erlanger for the investment of your time and positive energy. Patricia Bell-Scott, thanks for being the

mid-wife that helped me birth the newest evolution of my self. You believed in me and in what I wanted to pursue. You had the guts to ask hard questions but did so with lots of compassion and then stuck by me as I moved through the details. Thank you for all your hard work and the giving of your time, skills, and self.

I owe the biggest debt of gratitude to the women I interviewed. They gave me a most precious and invaluable gift of their stories. They were some of my most powerful teachers. Words are inadequate to express my thanks. I promise I am doing what I can and will continue to do what I can to make sure your message is heard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study.....	2
Research Questions for the Study	2
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	3
Introduction.....	3
Definitions of Emotional Abuse	4
Definition of Emotional Abuse for the Purposes of This Study.....	8
Prevalence of Emotional Abuse	8
Effects of Abuse.....	12
Exiting Abusive Relationships.....	17
Conceptual Framework for the Present Study	19
3 METHODOLOGY	22
Introduction.....	17
Design	23
Issues of Validity and Reliability.....	23
Procedures	26
Analysis of Data.....	30

4	PARTICIPANT CHAPTERS	32
	Mary.....	32
	Alice.....	68
	Vicki.....	79
	Eliza	113
	Becka.....	127
	Jordan.....	156
	Lori.....	165
5	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	200
	Introduction.....	200
	Research Question I	200
	Research Question II.....	228
	Research Question III.....	234
	Conclusions	240
6	IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS	243
	REFERENCES	245
	APPENDICES	
	A SAMPLE LETTER TO CONTACTS AND RESOURCE PEOPLE	252
	B NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT.....	254
	C FLYER	255
	D LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS	256
	E SCREENING TOOL QUESTIONS.....	258
	F INFORMED CONSENT.....	259

G INTERVIEW GUIDE I.....	262
H INTERVIEW GUIDE II	264
I LIST COUNSELING RESOURCES IN THE ATHENS AREA	265
J EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY MARY	266
K EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY ALICE.....	267
L EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY VICKI.....	268
M EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY ELIZA	269
N EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY BECKA....	270
O EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY JORDAN ..	271
P EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY LORI	272

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table	
1 Evolution of Definitions of Emotional Abuse	7
2 Loring's and Chang's Definitions of Emotional Abuse	9
3 Types of Emotional Abuse Experienced by the Participants	202
4 Percentage of Women Experiencing Each Type of Abuse	205

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When researchers first began to study abuse, the primary focus was on physical abuse. Emotional abuse was considered to be a secondary part of the picture--or left out entirely. Although research on emotional abuse has increased in the last decade and scholars recognize that emotional abuse and physical abuse often occur simultaneously, we know little about the frequency and pattern of emotional abuse, especially when physical abuse is absent or infrequent (Loring, 1994; Chang, 1996).

Some of the earliest studies of emotional abuse were done on married and cohabiting heterosexual couples (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; O'Hearn, 1992; Patrick-Hoffman, 1982; Stets, 1990, 1991). Recent studies have included college and high-school age populations (Molidor, 1995). In general, young heterosexual couples and individuals represent the major population upon which the current knowledge base about emotional abuse is drawn.

In addition to studying narrow populations, researchers have usually asked participants about their present or most recent relationship. Rarely have participants been queried about their past and current relationships (Kelly & DeKeserdy, 1994; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Stets, 1991) or about their experiences of emotional abuse across relationships (Kelly & DeKeserdy, 1994). Therefore, the picture we have of emotional abuse in intimate relationships is incomplete.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to our understanding of women's experiences of emotional abuse across romantic relationships thus allowing for a broader view of how emotional abuse affects them. Also, because the women in this study are older than the participants in most studies of emotional abuse and have diverse relationship statuses (e.g., married, never married, divorced), it is hoped that the findings will contribute to a representative picture of women's experiences.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore women's experience of emotional abuse across relationship contexts. The sample was comprised of women between 30 and 45 years of age who had experienced little or infrequent physical abuse. The specific objectives were to explore what women perceived as emotional abuse, how they came to define it as such, what were the dynamics of emotional abuse, how women's sense of themselves and their relationships changed, and how women move beyond the abuse.

Research Questions for the Study

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do women describe and assign meaning to their history, perception, and experience of emotional abuse?
2. What factors are associated with women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships?
3. What factors are associated with women's exit and recovery from emotionally abusive relationships?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The study of abuse in intimate relationships began in the 1970s (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979)--about thirty years ago. Initially, the focus was on physical abuse in couples who were either married or cohabiting (Steinmetz, 1987; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979) and much of the data were gathered from telephone surveys or the reports of women contacted through shelters. Over time researchers determined that physical abuse was not the only kind of abuse women experienced. In 1979, Walker introduced the concept of emotional abuse as an important aspect of abusive relationships. In a series of detailed interviews with over 400 women from rural and urban environments in the western United States, Walker found that many women reported that emotional abuse was more detrimental and long-lasting than physical abuse. Walker (1979; 1984) also found that the subjective pain of emotional abuse was more difficult to quantify than physical abuse.

Researchers who study emotional abuse indicate that it is a complex phenomenon. In addition to being as or possibly more devastating than physical abuse, emotional abuse appears to have many forms. In one study (Patrick-Hoffman, 1982), women reported that they had been the victim of twenty-one different types of emotionally abusive behaviors.

Because emotional abuse can and does occur simultaneously with physical abuse, scholars have sought to determine whether or not emotional abuse was an independent

phenomenon of physical abuse. Loring (1994) pursued this question in a study of a diverse sample of 121 women who were divided into three groups: 1) those who experienced no abuse; 2) those who experienced physical and emotional abuse; and 3) those who experienced emotional abuse but no physical abuse. She discovered that emotional abuse did exist as a separate phenomena and that the pattern of emotional abuse was different from the well-documented cycle of physical battering. Loring (1994) also found that women who experienced both emotional and physical abuse were more likely than women who experienced emotional abuse only to identify themselves as emotionally abused. Chang (1996) found similar patterns in a smaller study.

The works of Chang (1996), Loring (1994), Patrick-Hoffman (1984), and Walker (1979, 1984) have expanded what is known about emotional abuse. The intent of this study is to add to our understanding of women's complex experiences of emotional abuse across relationship contexts.

Definitions of Emotional Abuse

Non-physical abuse has been more difficult to identify, conceptualize, and operationalize (Chang, 1996; Follingstad, et. al., 1990; Loring, 1994; Patrick-Hoffman, 1982; Stets, 1990; Straus, 1979; Tolman, 1989) than physical abuse. Several terms (e.g., psychological abuse, psychological aggression, emotional abuse, etc.) have been used interchangeably to label this phenomenon. Walker (1979) used the term psychological abuse and divided it into four categories of behavior: (a) verbal abuse; (b) isolation; (c) jealousy and/or possessiveness of one's partner; and (d) threats of abuse. Patrick-Hoffman's study of emotional abuse identified some twenty behaviors including: denial of the women's perceptions, overt aggression, disregard for the women's desires or

feelings, possessiveness and isolation, use of verbally disparaging language in public and private places, and refusal to acknowledge any responsibility for problems in the relationship.

In the last decade, scholars have expanded Walker's (1979) definition by distinguishing emotional from psychological abuse (Aguilar & Nightengale, 1994; Follingstad, et al., 1990; Lupri, Grandin, & Brinkerhoff, 1994; Shepard & Campbell, 1992; Stets, 1991; Tolman, 1989). Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, and Polek (1990) refer to ridicule, jealousy, restriction of women from doing something, and damage to property as emotional abuse. Similar behaviors were identified as emotional abuse by Tolman (1989) in the development of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI). O'Hearn (1992) defined emotional abuse as “. . . efforts to demean or control a person via attacks on the person's self-esteem or status . . .” (p. 1). A comparison of the operationalization of emotional abuse by some of the major researchers in the field is presented in Table 1.

In an effort to assure that the terminology used to describe emotional abuse was precise, Loring (1994) made a purposeful choice: “I use the term *emotional abuse* rather than *psychological abuse* or *maltreatment* in an attempt to encompass the relational and societal components of this process . . .” (p. vii-viii). Loring (1994) defined emotional abuse as “. . . an on-going process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the victim are constantly belittled . . .” (p. 1). Loring (1994) also distinguished between covert and overt forms of emotional abuse. Covert

Table 1

Evolution of Operational Definitions of Emotional Abuse

Investigator/ year	Straus, 1979	Walker, 1979	Patrick-Hoffman, 1982	Follingstad, et.al., 1990	Stets, 1990	Tolman, 1989
Primary construct	Verbal aggression	Psychological aggression	Psychological abuse	Emotional abuse	Psychological aggression	Psychological maltreatment
Primary behaviors identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stomped out of the room or house or yard threatened to hit or throw something insulted or swore or did or said something to spite threw or smashed or hit or kicked something sulked or refused to talk about an issue cried 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> verbal abuse isolation jealousy and/or possessiveness of one's partner threats of abuse threats of death by abuser (suicide), woman, other family members, or friends vague threats humiliation interruption of eating and sleeping patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> silent treatment overt angry behavior slave-master or person-thing relationship possessiveness disparaging treatment in front of acquaintance unreliable with regards to commitment erratic behavior suicide threats isolation refusal to accept responsibility for marriage relationship vile language directed toward the woman sleep deprivation negative attitude toward woman misuse of recreational activity to point of addiction frequent and severe criticism of woman loss of interest in woman immediately or soon after marriage financial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These researchers included all behaviors identified by Walker (1979) and two more: threat to divorce or abandon wives or to have an affair damage or destruction of personal property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> insulted woman said things to upset woman made woman feel inferior said mean things to woman gave woman cold shoulder degraded woman criticized woman hurt woman's feelings called woman names 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> put down physical appearance insulted or shamed in front of others insensitive to feelings told her could not take care of herself without him criticisms of care of children or household kept from getting medical care called names yelled, screamed, swore at treated woman like an inferior sulked or refused to talk about problem gave woman silent treatment withheld affection insensitive to sexual needs or desires demanding obedience to partner's whims treated partner like personal servant did not include partner in important financial decisions <p>*(only a partial list of behaviors)</p>

emotional abuse was conceptualized as a “. . . complex pattern of negative feedback” that has a profoundly negative effect on the victim:

Over time these covert mechanisms of labeling, discounting, and negation lead to diminution and destruction of the self. Victims describe feeling that the constituent parts of the self—the individual characteristics, abilities, and skills, preferences and wishes, dreams and aspirations—no longer cohere. This fragmentation affects the victim’s thinking and judgment. She may have uncontrollable intrusive thoughts and mental images that reinforce over and over the abuser’s denigrating and negative labeling (Loring, 1994, p.3, 5-6).

Overt emotional abuse referred to more obvious forms such as name-calling, put-downs.

Table 2 summarizes Loring’s (1994) and Chang’s (1996) operational definitions of emotional abuse.

Definition of Emotional Abuse for the Purposes of This Study

The dissertation was guided by the work of Loring (1994) who has defined emotional abuse as a process that attacks the core of a person (i.e., a woman’s ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics). In this study, emotional abuse was defined as a continuous series of interactions in which one person attacks the ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of another whose sense of self is diminished in the process.

Prevalence of Emotional Abuse

Although more researchers have studied emotional abuse in the last decade, there are no definitive statistics on the number of women experiencing emotional abuse. In part, this is because the phenomenon is not one that is easily discussed or readily identified. In

Table 2

Loring (1994) and Chang's (1996) Operational Definitions of Emotional/ Psychological Abuse

Chang (1996): Psychological abuse	Loring (1994): Emotional abuse	
Psychological abuse	Covert emotional abuse	Overt emotional abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repeated ridicule • verbal attacks • threats • accusation • verbal hostility • unrealistic expectations • domination • name-calling • economic deprivation involving withholding, regulating, and controlling money in coercive ways • social humiliation such as threatening or acting in embarrassing, aggressive or obnoxious ways in order to force accommodation to demands • social isolation including determining allowable associates and establishing inappropriate restrictions • sexual domination in terms of excessive demands for a sexual relationship and sexual put-downs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discounting • negation • projection or accusation • denial (of abuse by the abuser) • negative labeling • subtle threats of physical and or emotional abandonment or actual physical and or emotional abandonment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belittling • yelling • name-calling • criticizing • ordering around • sulking • withholding affection • ignoring • isolating from family and friends • monitoring time and activities • attempting to restrict resources (finances, telephone) • interfering with opportunities (job, medical care, education) • accusing the victim of engaging in repeated purposively hurtful behaviors • throwing objects, not necessarily at the victim • slamming of objects or doors • ridiculing the victim • expressing disgust toward the victim • threatening to abandon (physically or emotionally) • expressing excessive jealousy • threatening life, pets, property or family • exposing the victim to abuse of her children, pets or parents • coercing the victim into illegal activity • provoking the victim into helpless flailing

addition, there seems to be evidence of two distinct groups: (1) women experiencing both physical and emotional abuse where the emotional abuse precedes and co-exists with the physical abuse (Follingstad, et al., 1990; Walker, 1979) and (2) women experiencing only emotional abuse who do not see themselves as emotionally abused (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994).

When statistics on emotional abuse are provided, they vary a great deal. This may result, in part, from the lack of consistency in how the term is operationalized. Loring (1994) has argued that emotional abuse is widespread, goes unidentified and may be the most unrecognized form of abuse.

Straus & Gelles (1986) found that about one quarter of all married women were physically abused in a given year. Since it is known that emotional abuse accompanies physical abuse, it is reasonable to speculate that at least one quarter of all married women experienced emotional abuse. Furthermore, since abuse tends to be a relationship pattern, those married and cohabiting women who experienced abuse are likely to be abused in the same relationship in the future unless there is intervention.

Studies of college-aged populations document similar patterns of emotional abuse. Rouse (1988), in a comparison of White, Black, and Hispanic college students, found similar patterns and rated by types of abuse across ethnic groups, including possessiveness and moderate physical abuse. In a study of 325 heterosexual college-aged women and men, Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs (1985) found that over 65% had experienced verbal abuse during their dating histories.

Kelly and DeKeserdy (1994) asked Canadian female college students about their experiences of emotional abuse in the last year and over the course of their dating

histories since high school. They found that 79% of the participants reported having experienced emotional abuse the year prior to the study, whereas 86% reported having experienced emotional abuse at sometime since high school. Pipes and LeBov-Keeler (1997) found that 11% of the college age women in their study self-identified as emotionally abused in exclusively heterosexual relationships.

In a study of 311 African-American heterosexual college students (76 males and 235 females), over half reported having been in a dating relationship where they experienced verbally aggressive behaviors (Clark, Beckett, Wells, & Dungee-Anderson, 1995). At least one incident of verbal aggression was directed at 91% of the males and 88% of the females. Furthermore, 92% of the males and 94% of the females had acted in a verbally aggressive manner at least once with a partner. This study is especially important because these investigators queried African-American participants, a neglected population, about their experiences as victims and perpetrators.

In a comprehensive review of the literature on physical abuse in heterosexual dating relationships Sugarman & Hotaling (1989) found that one third of all participants (both female and male) experienced physical abuse in their dating relationships and 11% to 57% of the women experienced physical abuse over the course of their relationship histories. Numerous researchers have indicated that emotional abuse pre-dates and co-occurs with physical abuse (Follingstad, et al., 1990; Molidor, 1993; Tolman, 1989; Walker, 1979). Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that the rates of physical abuse in Sugarman and Hotaling's (1989) review, provide some indication of the prevalence of emotional abuse among dating couples.

Several scholars have found an association between relationship intensity and abuse. Kasian and Painter (1992) surveyed over 1600 Canadian college women and men and found high levels of emotional abuse in relationships where there were formal commitments. Raymond and Bruschi (1989) reported that college women experienced ignoring, controlling, and blaming behaviors from their boyfriends “at least several times a year.” In a study of high school heterosexual dating relationships, Molidor (1993) found that emotional abuse was highest among participants who were also experiencing severe physical abuse. Morse (1993), in a study of college women’s experiences of emotional abuse, indicated that 35 to 54% had experienced their partners’ jealousy of their friends or other men.

There is considerable difference in the rates of emotional abuse across studies. This difference may reflect differences in definitions, instruments, population size and composition, the time period in which abuse occurred, and who identified the abuse (i.e., the researcher or respondent).

Effects of Abuse

Although physical abuse can result in serious injuries, women who have been physically abused report that emotional abuse may have an equal or greater impact (Follingstad, et al., 1990; Rollstin & Kern, 1998; Walker, 1984). For this reason, many researchers now include questions about emotional abuse in investigations of the impact of physical abuse on women. Given the differences in sample populations and definitions of abuse, it is difficult to compare research findings in this area. Representative studies include participants who have experienced emotional abuse only; those who have experienced emotional abuse with minor or infrequent physical abuse; those who have

experienced emotional abuse with moderate or severe physical abuse; and those who have not reported abuse.

Emotional abuse may affect women in a variety of ways. The major effects include mood disturbances (e.g., depression), an impaired sense of self (e.g., low or poor self-esteem and locus of control), and behavioral dysfunction (e.g., poor locus of control and difficulties in exiting the relationship). According to Loring (1994), emotional abuse, “. . . dismembers the victim’s self by systematically attacking her personality, style of communication, accomplishments, values, and dreams.” (p. 15). The cumulative impact of “the abuser’s emotional attacks are experienced as symbolic equivalents of a rape of the self” (Loring, 1994, p. 36). A discussion of several of the outcomes of emotional abuse follows.

Depression.

Several researchers have found an association between abuse and depression in women. Dutton and Painter (1993) found that women who had been battered or emotionally abused experienced depression. Migeot and Lester (1996) found that men and women’s experience of emotional abuse was associated with high scores on the Beck Depression Inventory.

Vitanza, Vogel, and Marshall (1995) examined the differences in depression between groups of women who were experiencing emotional abuse. They found that women who scored high on private self-consciousness may be more vulnerable to emotional abuse than other women. Those who scored high on private self-consciousness tended to think a great deal about their own perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The

combination of private self-consciousness and the demeaning or degrading experience of emotional abuse predisposed some women to depression.

In Chang's (1996) study, participants reported, ". . . that as the abuse continued they lost their sense of self, became depressed, and often became physically sick" (p. 110). Over time the women came to experience this state as "normal," rather than as depression.

A more recent study assessed the effects of two types of emotional abuse on depressive symptomology. Using the emotional-verbal and dominance-isolation scales of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI), Katz and Arias (1999) assessed the relationship between types of emotional abuse and depressive symptoms experienced by college-aged dating women at two different times. They found that emotional-verbal abuse had an immediate effect on depressive symptomology, whereas the effect of dominance-isolation abuse was moderated by women's sense of interpersonal control. That is, the greater women's sense of interpersonal control, the less effect dominance-isolation abuse had on feelings of depression.

Self-esteem.

Several researchers have indicated that women's self-esteem is affected by abuse (Chang, 1996; Hoffman, 1984; Loring, 1994; Tuel & Russell, 1998). Hoffman (1984) found that the longer the abuse, the more likely women were to believe the abuser's evaluation of them. Dutton and Painter (1993) reported diminished self-esteem for women who had been battered. Chang (1996) found that emotionally abused women had a decreased sense of self and less trust in their ability to make judgments and assess situations.

Locus of control.

Several researchers have identified an association between abuse and women's locus of control (Follingstad, et al., 1990). Migeot and Lester (1996) found that emotionally abused women scored low on internal locus of control. Orava, et. al., 1996 found that women who were living in shelters for victims of domestic violence had a poor sense of their own power to bring about social change. They also believed in the control of powerful others. The self-identified battered women in Aguilar and Nightengale's (1994) study also experienced a sense of being controlled by others rather than control within their own power.

Posttraumatic stress disorder and emotional abuse.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was initially associated with veterans of war or people experiencing natural or human-made disasters. Clinicians and researchers now recognize that the survivors of sexual and physical abuse also experience PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). There is, increasing awareness that women experiencing emotional abuse are at risk for developing PTSD (Loring, 1994; Vitanza, et. al., 1995). In Vitanza's (1995) study of women suffering emotional and physical abuse, 56% experienced PTSD.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (1994), a person is at risk for developing PTSD if they have been

“. . . exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present: (1) the person experienced, or witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the

physical integrity of self or others; (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror (p. 428).

If a person develops PTSD then she is likely to re-experience the traumatic event through recurrent distressing dreams and intrusive thoughts, to have periods of dissociation in which she re-experiences the event as it happened, and to experience distress that is triggered emotionally and physiologically by events somewhat similar to or symbolic of the event (APA, 1994). Women suffering from PTSD typically avoid activities or situations that are likely to trigger reminders of the event. They may also exhibit "psychic numbing" which makes them less responsive to immediate events. Many PTSD sufferers have a sense of disconnection from people, activities, and emotions, as well as increased arousal and anxiety, an exaggerated startle response, difficulties with concentration or task-completion, and a sense of a foreshortened future (APA, 1994).

Loring (1994) has argued that the trauma resulting from emotional abuse can manifest as PTSD. Emotionally abused women have reported frequent flashbacks, difficulty concentrating and sleeping, and intrusive memories. Also, memories and thoughts about previous events may come at a rate that overwhelms and is known as "flooding." Women who experience flooding can be re-traumatized and distracted from their present activities. They may also become accident-prone.

"Traumatic bonding" is another possible outcome of emotional abuse. Traumatic bonding refers to a kind of attachment to an abuser who alternates between terroristic behavior and kindness. This attachment severely inhibits women's ability to detach from the abuser. There is a loss of self. "Only when they have developed a more integrated

sense of themselves and reestablished connectedness with other individuals and a supportive community can women approach” separation (Loring, 1994, p. 46).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder often co-occurs with depression, anxiety disorders, and/or substance abuse. It is not yet clear whether these disorders are part of the complexity of PTSD, a result of symptom over-reporting, or related to the person’s predisposition to PTSD (Brady, Killeen, Brewerton, Lucerini 2000; Symes, 1995). The symptoms of PTSD, clinical depression and anxiety disorders are similar and include sleep problems, concentration problems, avoidance of and isolation from people and situations, and lack of interest in previously-enjoyed activities. These co-morbidity issues call attention to the problems of diagnosing and treating emotional abuse because of its resemblance to other disorders.

Exiting Abusive Relationships

There are several barriers to women’s ability to leave an abusive relationships: (a) they may be unaware that emotional abuse is occurring; (b) the relationship with the abusive partner may be similar to relationships in the family of origin or previous partners and therefore feel familiar; (c) they have a diminished sense of self; and (d) the abuser has denied the abuse and blamed the woman, thus inflicting further emotional damage. According to Loring (1994), some women have been emotionally abused in childhood and that experience along with the inequities in their families and society at large, reinforces a negative view of themselves:

The victim’s sense that emotional violence is normal and inevitable is frequently reflected in her attempts to change the situation in ways that leave intact the abuser’s right to denigrate her. Unable to imagine that the emotional violence

could stop, she is likely to assume much of the blame for the troubled relationship and to attempt to improve it by changing her own behavior. Or she may try to extract some small crumb of validation from the resistant abuser (p. 8-9).

In Hoffman's (1984) study, women who were no longer involved in a abusive relationship reported that it was difficult to leave because abusers often told them that this was the best relationship they would have. This message magnified women's negative self-image. Women had to overcome this view of themselves to gather the wherewithal to leave.

Raymond and Brushi (1989) found that some women who experienced emotional abuse in dating relationships chose to remain in those relationships. Among these women, expressions of kindness, defined as positive behaviors from men (e.g., giving compliments or providing women with emotional support), was an important factor in women's decision to stay. Raymond and Bruschi (1989) concluded that these women may hold the widely held view that being violent is a way to show love.

Chang (1996) also found that emotionally abused women's decision to leave was related to their age and the kindness of perpetrators. Younger women perceived more options--in terms of being able to earn an adequate income--than older women. For this reason, young women demonstrated a willingness to leave abusive relationships sooner than older women (Chang, 1996).

Kasian and Painter (1992) found the highest rates of emotional abuse "in formally committed relationships." Although emotional abuse lowered women's satisfaction with their relationship, abuse did not necessarily precipitate an end to the relationship. A lack

of positive behaviors was a better predictor of women's willingness to leave an emotionally abusive relationship (Kasian & Painter, 1992).

Conceptual Framework for the Present Study

A wide variety of intra-individual, social-psychological, and sociocultural theories have been used to explain why and how abuse occurs. Theoretical conceptualizations have evolved from an early focus on individual psychopathology, to an emphasis on cultural influences, to the recognition that multiple individual and cultural factors are involved, to the recognition that there is no simple explanation (Loring, 1994; Steinmetz, 1987; Straus, et. al., 1980; Walker, 1979).

This study relies on attachment theory to explore the dynamics of women's experience of emotional abuse. Attachment theory is a perspective that explores the role of individual, family, cultural, and societal factors in human attachment/ relational behavior.

Bowlby (1977) conceived of attachment theory as a way to understand several phenomena. First, he explored the bonds of affection infants make with caretakers. Second, he considered how what infants learned through from bonding with caretakers is extrapolated to other relationships. Finally, he considered the relationship between problematic bonds with caretakers and, “. . . the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression and emotional detachment which unwilling separation and loss give rise” (Bowlby, 1977, p. 201).

According to Bowlby (1979) children who have experienced consistent understanding, nurturing behavior, validation, and empathy from adults develop a sense of security and an expectation that his or her needs will be met. Although these adults

may not be physically and emotionally present one hundred percent of the time, children develop a secure attachment to them. This security allows the children to explore the world comfortably and confident in their abilities. From these relationships, children develop an “internal working model” which serves as a template for subsequent relationships. This model affirms the children of their worth and value (Bowlby, 1977).

A number of scholars have validated Bowlby’s idea that early adult-child relations become the template for other relationships (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Hazen & Shaver, 1990; Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Kabok & Sceery, 1988; O’Hearn, 1992; O’Hearn & Davis, 1992). Securely attached children grow into adults who develop secure relationships (Bowlby, 1979).

Children whose caretakers were inconsistent or not available exhibited anxious attachment behavior (Bowlby, 1977, 1979). Anxiously attached children may have had caretakers who: (a) ignored or rejected the children’s expressed needs; (b) may have been emotionally or physically absent and therefore, not able to attend the children’s needs; or (c) threatened to be unavailable emotionally or physically (Bowlby, 1979). Children who have experienced anxious attachment may search repeatedly for validation and affection they did not receive from primary caretakers (Bowlby, 1979) The “internal working model” of relationships for these children reflects the inconsistency of attachment with caretakers. As adults these children may re-experience failed attempts at connection and come to see this as normal. For this reason, minimal amounts of kindness, empathy, and attempts at connection by the abuser may be seen as acceptable (Loring, 1994).

Loring (1994) found that victims of emotional abuse often have a history of anxious attachment that makes them vulnerable to the threat of emotional and physical abandonment. As adults these women felt vulnerable physically and emotionally, disconnected from others, misunderstood, unloved, and obligated to make the needs of others the highest priority.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore women's experience of emotional abuse across relationship contexts. A naturalistic paradigm and qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis were used to examine how women organized and conveyed meaning to their experiences (Mishler, 1986).

The naturalistic paradigm has several key assumptions. First, there is the assumption of multiple realities which allows space for women's reports of their experiences and their explanations of how these experiences fit into their lives. Second, there is an assumption that ". . . the knower and known are interactive, inseparable" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). Thus the women interviewed in this study influenced the researcher's understanding of emotional abuse and the interview process influenced how women saw their experiences.

Third, there is the assumption that, "[a]ll entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). In examining women's stories, it is important to remember that it is impossible to capture and isolate life. Life is a dynamic process.

Finally, there is an assumption in the naturalistic paradigm that research is affected by the researcher's values and beliefs and the context in which the study takes

place. For this reason, care must be taken to acknowledge the values, beliefs, circumstances, and context in which the research is done.

Design

This study was guided by three research questions rather than formal hypotheses. Two interview guides comprised of questions that allowed the participants to interpret their experiences in their own words were designed (see Appendices G and H). These guides ensured that the same areas were explored with all participants. They also allowed for exploration of experiences that had not been anticipated. The first interview gathered basic information. The second interview involved in-depth questioning and follow-up on issues that emerged in the first interview.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

Although there are many differences between the positivist and naturalistic paradigms, investigators using either paradigm must answer the question, “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The trustworthiness of any study must be assessed and the manner in which this is done in qualitative studies is described below.

Credibility

Whereas in the naturalistic paradigm a belief in multiple realities as opposed to a single reality is accepted, the descriptions and interpretations of a study must be recognizable or have truth for those people who have experienced or know about the phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One criteria for assessing trustworthiness in qualitative research is whether the descriptions and interpretations are credible. Internal

validity (when it is known that the changes in the dependent variable are due to changes in the independent variable) is analogous to credibility (Krefting, 1991).

In the present investigation credibility was assessed using a number of techniques, one of which was prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement requires, “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes” (p. 301 Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Over two extended interviews, trust was built with the participants. This rapport provided opportunities to identify potential distortions in the data created by the researcher or the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another technique used was reflexive analysis. This involved keeping a journal in which the development of the design, decisions made, and the logistics of the study were recorded. A second journal was used to record general notes about the study, information about the setting, impressions of the interview, as well as the perceptions, thoughts, feelings, ideas, and biases of the researcher. These journals began with the development and writing of the prospectus. This process was reviewed by the researcher and by the committee methodologist who is also the major professor.

A third technique related to credibility was the use of member checks, which involved “revealing research materials to the informants” in order to assure accurate translation of their viewpoints into data (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). This process required checking back with the participants about the information they provided so that they could comment, evaluate, and confirm that the recorded narrative reflected their experience. Member checks were done between the first and second interviews.

A fourth technique was peer examination, which involved discussion of the transcriptions, interpretations, conclusions, and the research process with the committee

methodologist (Krefting, 1991). This was done throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is analogous to external validity in quantitative research (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved through the preparation of “thick description” which allow those evaluating or using the study to make judgments (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the transferability of the findings, detailed background information about the participants and context of the study were provided for future researchers (Krefting, 1991).

Dependability

Dependability is analogous to reliability in quantitative studies (Krefting, 1991). Peer examination and dependability audits were used to assess dependability. Individuals who helped with the peer examination included the major professor, fellow students also involved in qualitative research, and work colleagues familiar with the topic.

All of these individuals provided feedback on the research plan and how the study was implemented (Krefting, 1991). Although others were helpful in the dependability audit, the major professor whose specialty is qualitative research and in particular, narrative analysis and interview techniques, was the primary auditor of the study. She reviewed the researcher process, interview transcriptions, and compared the information collected in the interviews, the notebooks, and the overall findings of the study.

Researcher as instrument

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research. For this reason, steps must be taken to assure that the researcher’s biases and subjectivity are adequately

addressed. Reflexive analysis, member checks, peer examination, and “thick” descriptions of the participants and research journals detailing the methodology, and analysis were done in this study. There were periodic consultations with clinical researchers about how best to remain in the researcher rather than clinical role (Groves, 1991; E. W. Lindsey, personal communication, May, 1997).

Procedures

Participants and Sampling

The criteria used to identify women for the study were that women: (a) be between the ages of 30-45, (b) have been in a serious relationship, (c) were no longer in an emotionally abusive relationship, and (d) had little or no experience of physical abuse.

Women between the ages of 30-45 were targeted because this group was more likely to have had several relationships and to have experienced emotional abuse. Women of this age cohort were more likely to have experienced the transition from home, to college (if they attended) and into the workplace. They were also better prepared to make retrospective comments about their life.

Ethnic diversity was a goal that proved to be unattainable. Women from diverse ethnic heritage were interested in the study, however, they did not meet the sample criteria.

Two selection/recruitment strategies were used: “typical-case selection” and “snowball selection.” The “typical-case selection” strategy entailed using a list of participants’ attributes to identify average cases (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). “Snowball selection” involved asking women who had chosen to participate in the study to identify other women who fit the criteria. “This strategy is useful in situations where the

individuals investigated are scattered throughout the population and form no naturally bounded common groups” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 74).

Recruitment

The study was announced to the community in several ways. Letters (see Appendix A) were sent to therapists, asking that they pass along information about the study to their clients. Advertisements were placed in two publications--the *Flagpole* and a church newsletter. The *Flagpole* is a free weekly community arts and entertainment newspaper. In the advertisement (see Appendix B), prospective participants were asked to call a phone number and leave a message or to send a letter to a post office box rented by the researcher. An advertisement was placed in the newsletter of a local church and a flyer was displayed on the church bulletin board. Flyers describing the study were placed in various locations around the community (see Appendix C). An announcement was also placed on a local women’s studies list-serv.

Six women were contacted with the assistance of professionals in the community. Two women responded to the advertisement in the church newsletter and two responded to the posting on the women’s studies list-serv. Five women were prompted by flyers posted in the community and eight women responded to the advertisement in the *Flagpole*. All but one woman chose to call the voice mailbox.

A total of twenty-three women expressed interest in the study. Each was sent a letter (see Appendix D) detailing the study and the selection criteria. About a week after the letter was sent, the women were contacted by phone. They were asked if they had any questions and if they were still interested in participating.

A Screening Tool Questionnaire (see Appendix E) was used to determine if the women met the criteria. If there were questions about the eligibility of a participant, the major professor was consulted; and a decision was made and explained to the woman. For the women who met the sample criteria, an appointment for the first interview was scheduled at a convenient place and time.

Six women were unable to participate because of the age criteria. One woman was unable to participate because of geographic distance. Five women were excluded because they had experienced physical abuse frequently in their relationships. Four women were excluded because they could not be contacted. One woman contacted the researcher too late for inclusion. All of the women who expressed interest in the project but did not meet the criteria were offered a list of counseling resources.

Data collection

Because the quality of the women's narrative is dependent upon the relationship or rapport with the researcher, interviews were conducted in a place that participants found comfortable. Two women wanted to be interviewed at home. Another woman wanted to be interviewed at work. The remaining four women were interviewed at a location secured by the researcher.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format that focused on particular topics and gave the women room to build a narrative of their experiences (Patton, 1990; Riessman, 1993). Each interview was audiotaped and participants were asked to provide pseudonyms for themselves, partners, and children. These pseudonyms were used in all communication and documents related to the study. Some of the women requested that the researcher choose the pseudonym.

Topic areas for the first interview (see Appendix G) included: demographic background, relationship histories, and the experience of emotional abuse. The *Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors* (a Checklist that was adapted from several researchers' definitions of emotional abuse) was also administered during the first interview.

Questions for the second interview (see Appendix H) focused on the effects of the abuse, women's self-perceptions, as well as follow-up questions from the first interview. Issues from the first interview were summarized at the beginning of the second interview.

Seven women were selected for the study. Two were recruited through letters to professionals. One was recruited through fliers in the community, another through the advertisement at the church. Three women responded to the advertisement in the *Flagpole*. All expressed a desire to participate in the study with the hope that sharing information from their lives would be helpful to other women and lessen the chance that others would experience emotional abuse.

Before the first interview, the informed consent agreement (see Appendix F) was reviewed and signed. Women were given a copy of the agreement and the researcher kept a copy. Interview Guide I (see Appendix G) was administered after the consent forms were done. After the first interview, women were given a list of counseling resources (see Appendix I) and the second interview was scheduled. During the second interview, Interview Guide II (see Appendix H) was used. At the end of this interview, women were paid \$40. The interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes.

The first interview was transcribed and reviewed by the researcher before the second interview took place. This allowed for the identification of questions for further clarification and follow-up.

Analysis of Data

Since the focus of this study was women's experiences of emotional abuse across relationship contexts, the use of narrative analysis provided the opportunity for women's stories to inform future research. This type of analysis has been used in many disciplines including anthropology, psychology, and sociology (Cortazzi, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993). In using narrative analysis, researchers explore the way in which people have constructed the stories, the meanings they ascribe to particular events or circumstances, and the way stories are connected to the cultural systems in which participants live (Mishler, 1986, Riessman, 1993).

After the first interview, a rough transcription of each interview was prepared. Following Riessman's (1993) recommendations, this rough draft contained not only the spoken words but also "other striking features," including tone of voice, long pauses, crying, laughing, etc. (p. 56). In narrative analysis, as with other qualitative methods, data collection and analyses proceeded simultaneously (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990; Riessman, 1993). As mentioned previously, methodological as well as general field notes were used to capture analytic insights and monitor biases.

Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed with particular attention devoted to (a) the identification of interpretative categories and themes in the narrative, (b) the way the text of the story was constructed by the participants, (c) the way in which general cultural themes and values were expressed, and (d) the way in which the participants constructed understanding of events in their lives.

This analysis was a cyclic and continuous process that began with the first interview. It was a process that was informed by the work of Alexander (1988) who

recommended that the researcher let the data reveal itself and that the researcher ask the data a question. Alexander (1988) also identified nine principles of salience for sorting the data to make the themes and “guiding messages” visible. These include: (a) primacy, (b) frequency, (c) uniqueness, (d) negation, (e) emphasis, (f) omission, (g) error or distortion, (h) isolation, and (i) incompleteness.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT CHAPTERS

The stories of the seven women who participated in this study are presented in this section. All of the women were white and ranged in age from 31 to 43. The average age was 37. The median income was \$27,000 and ranged from \$7,000 to \$43,000. Three of the women were graduate students. Four worked full-time in the health, social service, financial, and education sectors of the labor market. Five of the women were married to emotionally abusive partners and are now divorced. Four of the women experienced emotional abuse prior to the emotionally abusive marriage. Two women dated their emotionally abusive partners. Five of the women are presently single and two are married for the second time.

Mary

Mary was a 32-year-old woman with expressive eyes and a warm excited manner. She was tall and slender to the point of being thin. Her small town southern upbringing was evident in her friendly manner and a wonderful accent. She had also that natural story-telling ability that seems especially prevalent amongst southerners.

We met on Saturday afternoons and each time Mary made herself comfortable on the couch with a pillow close by on her unprotected side. During the first interview she mentioned sinus troubles and looked tired but spoke with intensity. Before the second interview, Mary was hospitalized for what she said was a frequent condition, irritable

bowl syndrome, as well as sinus troubles. When we met again she looked better and seemed more at ease.

Although Mary became tearful at one time during the first interview, she said that she was fine and that she wanted to continue. She believed, she said, that the interviews were helpful personally. She also wanted to help other women avoid emotionally abusive relationships by participating in the study.

Mary had been divorced from her husband, Michael, less than six months and the experience of emotional abuse was fresh in her mind. She had a new job that pleased and excited her. She was also in the process of reconnecting with the artistic part of herself. Art sustained Mary through a difficult and abusive childhood but she lost touch with it during the marriage.

Family of Origin

Mary grew up in a two-parent family with a younger sister. Her parents were abusive to each other. They were also abusive and neglectful of the children. Mary explained:

When I grew up as a child, I grew up in a very volatile home. My parents fought even from as far back as I can remember, which I don't remember a lot of my childhood is another issue. I remember being young and watching my dad break every dish in my house as they screamed at each other. Your parents are standing right over you screaming and yelling and throwing things. So of course I had vowed to myself I would never let myself be in a relationship that would be that way.

Mary's mother was bi-polar and this had an impact on her:

. . . [Y]ou never felt safe and you never felt secure and you never knew what you were going to do to set off something. My mother is manic-depressive and is addicted to pain killers. That's a whole another issue too. But she took out a lot on me so I was the child . . . I was responsible for fixing things and keeping things equalized yet I was the one she took things out on. So I was used to being screamed at. I mean even my mother called me a bitch. I was always [in] trouble and never good enough, that kind of thing.

Childhood was circumscribed by her mother's illness:

. . . [W]hen I was a kid I never could just be a kid. And I could never let myself relax because as soon as I relaxed something happened. So I was a kid that always had to be on guard. That was probably a little bit wiser than most children and very sensitive cause I kind of knew more than I should know at my age. I used to get up in the middle of the night and take care of my mother and really insane stuff.

Mary also felt responsible for her youngest sister:

My youngest sister is my closest family member. I would die for that person. And I protected my younger sister a lot growing up. A lot of which she doesn't even know about.

Mary knew her parents cared about her. But their personal and relational problems interfered with responsible parenting:

My parents never really took us to the dentist regularly. They never took us to the doctor regularly. I had a cyst on my eye when I was little for probably a year and

a half before they took me to the doctor to actually get it looked at (laughs). And then, I had to have had a little minor surgery on my eye. I mean they never.....really, *I mean* (says with emphasis) they loved us but they never really cared about us, if that makes sense. I mean with my mom being so sick, that's probably one of the things that caused it all. My mother's manic depressive. . . . They'd forget me at school. I'd be by myself sitting in back of the school waiting for them to come get me. And I mean they'd forget to pick me up at places. And I mean it could be a long list of things (laughs). It could take me days to tell you all about that (laughs).

On the other hand, Mary's family was concerned about how they were perceived in the community. "Appearances are," Mary said, "very, very important. And you have to look like the perfect family on the outside even though everything is falling apart on the inside." Mary learned as a child not to talk about what she was experiencing. For this reason, she felt that doing this interview was helpful because it encouraged her to talk about her relationships:

I don't talk about a lot of things. I process it internally and I think a lot of that has to do with the way I was brought up too, because my household was so crazy all the time. I was afraid to say anything. I think this has been very helpful because.....it's like when you hear yourself say some things, sometimes it makes a lot more sense, you know? So, then to hear yourself say something kind of crazy, well, what seems crazy. And you're like, wait a minute! Ok, I'm feeling the right emotion here. (laughs)

The dynamics of her family of origin skewed her view of what intimate relationships were or should be:

I think a lot of what I understood love to be was that it was only love if it hurt. Because people hurt you when they love you and that's how you can tell it's love. That sounds really screwed up but I've been through therapy before because of my home life. Like I said [I had] a rough home life growing up. That was something that I realized and even now, I don't think I realized it as much as I do now. You know what I mean? So relationships that were not stormy didn't seem like true relationships for awhile.

Insecurity and the absence of trust became familiar patterns in Mary's life:

. . . [I]t's funny because when you never felt secure as a kid and you don't have the trust in your parents, because I don't have the level of trust in my parents that most people get, you're always out there looking for that trust and that peace and that kind of thing. With this intense relationship [refers to her relationship with Oliver a former boyfriend] it had all the up and down elements that I felt a relationship should have because of my parents, because they were up and down, up and down. By the end of that relationship, I realized that's not the way a normal relationship should be.

Therapy has helped Mary process what she experienced in her family. Acceptance of her mother's illness and the circumstances in which she grew up have given her some peace:

There came a point with my mother when I had to, I mean our situation was such that there's never a time where I could confront her and make her understand

what she's put me through. But I've come to a point where I've realized that my mother is just the way she is. She's got a mental illness. She put me through hell. I had to deal with that with myself and realize that I don't have a mom like everybody else has a mom. The little bit of my mom that I have is better than no mom at all. And she goes through these periods where she seems very normal, like now. Going through this divorce has brought her down. I mean she's on medication and everything. And still my mom's never, I mean she's never going to be normal, (sighs and laughs) but in a situation where I really, really needed her to be supportive, she's come out of the cloud and has been there. She's kind of fading back into the clouds, which I knew was coming, but if I need her, she has these moments of clarity which has been really helpful.

Significant Relationships

Mary has dated less than 20 people and only a handful of these were serious.

Mary has had trouble with serious or committed relationships:

I don't trust very easily.....I know this sounds bad, I don't mean this the way that it sounds, but I really don't trust men that quickly . . . (laughs) but for someone to get on a deeper level requires a lot of time and trust.

Mary spoke of three significant relationships. The first was with Russell, who was close to her in age. They dated in high school and the relationship ended disastrously when Mary was in college:

This person was someone who was totally not.....I could not see myself in a long term relationship. That did not mean that I did not love him with all my heart. I had a really rough go of it as a kid. And he was someone that helped me survive

that...I think it was really, really hard on him and it was really, really hard on me because of how much he did for me up to that point, and so when I did end that relationship he went kind of wacko. He threw me around and he didn't hit me but threw me around and the whole nine yards. He went crazy and got drunk. He and his brother-in-law came by and threatened to kill me and the police had to get involved and it was really crazy. . . . It was very scary. But then that was something that was not typical for him either. So that was the one really, really different relationship. The other relationships ended, I mean they were hard but none of that kind of drama.

Mary dated Oliver in college. He was, she said, someone incapable of loving anyone. Although Mary was glad that she left the relationship, she spoke warmly of Oliver as a person and of his abilities as an artist:

. . . [H]e, he was probably one of the best artists I ever knew. He was very, very talented. He was very, very intelligent. A rare, rare person when you're talking about talent and intelligence and that kind of thing. He was totally emotionally messed up and he grew up in an alcoholic home and his parents ended up divorcing and he had a lot of physical abuse as well. So, we had a very intense caring for each other, but we were totally bad for each other. And I grew to know that, that as much as I wanted to care for him, he was bad for me and made me feel bad. And so I needed to get away from that. He was a different person than Michael [Mary's husband] was. Because he could actually express emotion on a certain level. . . . It wasn't always positive and sunny and bright. And I think a lot of the emotional turmoil, he knew he was doing it but he couldn't, he didn't know

anything else and he didn't know how to not be that way. Because like I said there were moments where he was very sweet. He was never really mean to me. He was very sweet and could express car[e] . . . I think there were points where he could be tender and very emotional.

We shared art so that was a very intimate thing for both of us because it meant so much to us. We of course traveled together and that kind of thing so we had a lot of things in common that we could share, a lot of positive things. He was just not capable of letting himself trust in anybody, ever. So it took me awhile to get over that relationship because it was such a really intense, and had moments of positive things. And then to let that go, it was really hard because it was really like constantly being given a little snapshot of the way that things could be if he could just get there, you know?

Mary's most difficult relationship was her marriage to Michael. They had known each other for ten years, initially as friends. Then they dated for two years, long-distance part of this time. They broke up and were apart for a couple of years because Michael could not accept Mary's dream of being an artist:

And I was an art major in college . . . things I wanted to do with my life that he just didn't think were important. I mean, [Michael said] "You know, you're a dreamer and you always dream of things that will never happen. You know you're really not going to make it as an artist. If you will just come be with me, marry me.....I will make your life everything you've ever dreamed of."

Which now that I think back how could he have known what I dreamed of since he never listened to me? And that's why we broke up, because I was just

tired of.....him telling me that I couldn't . . . I mean, had I not been involved with him I probably would . . . be somewhere being a professional artist. . . . Professors at school told me I was one of those that could make it. I could be a professional artist if I stuck with it So it wasn't a dream. It could have been a reality for me. So while we were broken up, you know that's what I did.

They eventually reconciled. Of their reconnection, Mary said, “. . . [H]e gave me support and he just kind of wormed his way back in. And somehow he convinced me he could be the answer to all my problems.”

After a second cycle of dating, Mary and Michael moved to another state. They did not like it there, and decided to move back. Mary found a job quickly but Michael was unemployed for over a year: “. . . [H]e wanted to look for a job that he would enjoy and he would like and something that he dreamed of, that kind of thing.” Shortly after he got a job, Michael and Mary were married. They were married for four years.

Mary used the conflict she witnessed between her parents and their treatment of her as a measure of what she did not want from potential partners. Michael seemed to pass the test:

So when I married this man I thought, “Well I'm doin' great. I mean he doesn't hit me. This is a really good relationship.” I never saw the other side coming. I never knew. I never saw it coming, because I never thought--cause he's not mean to me. But he's just mean to me in a different way, so.

Once Mary realized that she wanted and needed to leave the relationship, she talked to Michael. He was not expecting a break-up:

Well, he is a very controlling not violent but just very, very controlling. Very egotistical almost narcissistic in some ways. He couldn't believe that I would want to leave him. Why would I.....want to leave him? (laughs) So, it took a while to end that. It was over a period of days and even weeks. And when he finally realized that I was going to go, he kind of flipped out a little bit. I'd never seen him look the way he did. Even his eyes looked crazy. And he, I mean of course the verbal shots started coming out at me and he kicked my pet across the room.....which was not typical for him. . . . [H]e could not understand why I would want to leave him, which is kind of funny for me to think of it now, because I'm tryin' to get over all the emotion of that.

And I guess I'll get to a point where I'll [not] be angry, but to me I can't, for me to sit there and think how he could convince me.....at this point. I'm just kind of having to work with that. But I think that was probably the most devastating relationship to end. And I think that coming back from that relationship has been very difficult. And I'm kind of dealing with things one thing at time, one issue at a time, one day at a time. So, it is a day-to-day struggle. I think I don't actually realize the scope of the relationship. I'm going to see that.

Well, I know I'm better off.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

The meaning of emotional abuse changed in Mary's mind after her experience in an emotionally abusive marriage. Earlier she would have said that the victim, “. . . would have to be yelled at and screamed at and put down and cussed at. No violence, I mean no

physical [violence] but throwing things, you know what I mean?" As a result of her marriage, she has expanded her definition:

Now I think it can definitely range anywhere from that to my experience with my ex-husband, he was very cold and very controlling and almost sometimes robotic and would use silence as a means to make me do what he wanted me to do. And not even just silence. He just never made me feel like I was capable of anything, which is so not the way I've been, you know. He cut down my self-esteem and made me feel like I was incapable of taking care of myself, and that I was lucky to even find him, and that I could never do any better than him. How could somebody else love me the way he does with all my flaws. And if you don't do or say what he wanted, you [would] get the sharp look and the crossed arms, and he may not talk to me for two or three days.

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Michael directed at Mary included belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticizing, discounting, sulking, ignoring, isolating her from family and friends, monitoring her time and activities, attempting to restrict her from resources such as the telephone or finances, interfering with opportunities (i.e., job, medical care, and education), throwing an object at her cat, negating her feelings or ideas, verbally attacking her, having unrealistic expectations of her, directing dominating behaviors at her, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, withholding affection from her, expressing disgust towards her, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, expressing excessive jealousy, labeling her in a negative way, driving recklessly to punish or scare her, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, and blaming her for his problems.

Michael did not see himself as abusive, Mary reported. He saw himself as someone who had her best interests at heart and who tried to take care of her: “. . . [H]e can't see that he's ever done anything wrong. He's the man and he tried to take care of me and I wouldn't let him, basically.” Mary has come to understand that from Michael's point of view, he did nothing wrong. Once they were married, in his perception, she “. . . became his property. I was his wife.” His dreams about their life took precedence over hers; and his view of the way their life was based on his view of his family. Mary described his expectation that she conform:

He grew up with his mom at home. She was there taking care of the kids. She didn't work while they were growing up. She cooked and she cleaned and I mean she was *the* (says with emphasis) female model of what the traditional woman should be: not out of line, doing what they were told at home, taking care of the kids. And that's what Michael was trying to convince me that I should be. So, to do that, that meant that he had to take everything that was important to me away because then I wouldn't have another choice. I mean, I have to do it his way. And I think that he probably, and I don't think it's on a conscious way, necessarily, you know, in a conscious way but I think that he figured out how he could almost manipulate me into doing the things that he wanted me to do. Therefore, making it impossible for me to leave because then he could have it exactly the way he wanted it and he thought it should be anyway. He wants someone that does not have a brain, does not have opinions, and says yes sir, no sir, you make the money sir. Will bear his children and take care of them and be perfect all the time. I just can't be perfect all the time.

Mary's experience with Michael's family of origin mirrored her experience with him. Initially his family looked ideal, but over time she saw the rigidity and control:

And his parents are controlling, as controlling in that way. I loved his family a lot because for me they modeled what I never had. But then over time, especially since I've been out [of the marriage], it always made me extremely uncomfortable to be around his family. And I could never put my finger on it because I loved them so much.

The problem was I couldn't be myself. It was all conditional. It was not unconditional. You had to say what they wanted to hear, you had to do what they wanted to do. If I ever tried to say no to his mother, she would be constantly, constantly on me until I said yes. You know what I mean? . . . And I could never say no and it be ok. I could never say that I didn't like it [her job], and that be ok. I had to be perfect all the time. And it just absolutely exhausted me. I just couldn't do it.

I think that's why I had so much trouble being around his family because I couldn't be myself. I was a nervous wreck all the time around his family. And his family wants to be overly involved in everything. They want to be there all the time. Even today if Michael gets a promotion or a new job his parents have to go see where he works, take pictures of where he works, be involved, go celebrate. It's just insane to me because it's so strict and rigid.

Michael's control over Mary's life began in courtship and escalated over the course of their relationship. This had two major consequences for her. First, she gave up her art because his plans did not include her continuing to work in that area. Second,

Mary came to believe that she could not make it without him. When she made decisions on her own, he monitored her behavior and expressed his disapproval. She explained:

And it was you know, crossed arms, the silent treatment, the kind of mean sharp looks, the disapproval. And he didn't even have to say I'm disappointed in you. I could tell. I mean I knew *It was* (says with emphasis) all body language. And the tone in his voice. And the look on his face. Because he, he's so.....cold and emotionless I see now.

Michael took charge of the couple's finances. Mary described what this was like: I gave him my paycheck when I got it. In the beginning we had one account and my check went into the account and I couldn't get any money without asking him first. . . . And then I insisted, I said, "You know, I can not ask you every single time I need money if we're writing out of one account. I need my own account." But then it was two joint accounts. So my money went into his account and I got an allowance basically. And once my money was gone I had to ask him for money. (sighs) So, things like that.

Michael controlled the finances--even when he had no job for a year and Mary was supporting them both. His micromanagement extended to grocery shopping:

We went together and I couldn't just put something in the basket. He had to tell me whether or not I needed it and whether or not I could get it. Literally! We spent less than fifty bucks a week on groceries and had nothing! Nothing!

Because he wouldn't let me buy things. I mean I had to ask, "Can I buy this cereal for my lunch next week and can I buy this to take with me or can we have this drink?" I couldn't buy drinks unless they were on sale, you know. Cokes and

Sprites and that kind of thing. And then I had to buy whatever was on sale that week, and if there wasn't anything on sale I had to wait until the next week. I mean just stupid stuff.

The impact of Michael's controlling behavior was devastating:

I mean it's kind of degrading to have someone, I mean imagine yourself being seven or eight years old and going to the grocery store with your parents and you're wanting to buy the cookies and the sweet cereals and they're saying no, no, no, you can't have that. As an adult 28, 29, 30 years old and having to ask him if I can buy necessities, really bizarre to me now (laughs), you know? I mean I wasn't allowed to just be an adult. And it's really hard to get out of that habit, too, because.....even though he's not there, it's almost like you're always looking over your shoulder to make sure that it's ok to buy this. It's ok if I turn my car on with the radio still on (raises voice) or turn it off and the air conditioner's still running, (lowers voice) you know what I mean?

Michael was critical of Mary's expenditures even when she purchased a gift for him. When she bought him a \$10 CD, his response was:

"Why did you waste your money on this?" It was constantly [something] with Michael. I mean you could never just enjoy. You always had to worry about what the price was.

Michael's monitoring and distrust of Mary was pervasive. She described what happened when she wanted to purchase an umbrella:

. . . [T]his one time about a year before we actually separated, this is really stupid, I mean I realize this is stupid. I wanted to buy an umbrella for \$4. He wouldn't let

me do it. He thought it was stupid. If I needed an umbrella, “Oh, you could buy one cheaper than that.” It was just ridiculous. And so, I needed the umbrella and ended up not having one and then I ended up buying a more expensive one because I had to have it at that moment because it was raining.

And we argued about that one day because we were looking for a cheap umbrella. We went from store to store to store looking for a cheaper umbrella than what we had seen. Well, we didn’t find one. So then we start fighting because I’m like, “If you had just listened to me, I could have my umbrella and it would have been fine.” And I would have paid what I was willing to pay for it. Just bizarre thing to fight about and so he just kept being cold about it and well I still think we can find one cheaper.

And I freaked out over this umbrella and we’re in the car. And I’m like, “Just listen to me!” I’m screaming at the top of my lungs, “Just listen to me, just listen to my opinion.” And I remember hitting the door and I said, “You never listen to me, you never take my opinions. I know what I’m talking about. I’m not stupid. Listen to me.” And I just screamed and screamed and screamed at the top of my lungs for him to listen to me. And he thought I was nuts.

When Mary’s “allowance” was spent she had to ask for money to pay for whatever she needed or wanted. This included medications and daily necessities. But there was a double standard in Michael’s attitude about how money was spent:

It was ok for him to spend money. He could go play golf two times a weekend or sometimes during the week and spend \$30.00 to rent the cart and then the green fees. I couldn’t do that. But see he felt like because he worked that he deserved

that. He made more money than I did so he deserved it more than I did. But I couldn't buy underwear because it cost money. I mean literally things like that. He could buy clothes for work but I could not. Because he was the lawyer and he needed the right things, but I had to wear clothes that were too small or too big. You know, for a long time I wore pants to work that were two sizes too big because he wouldn't let me go buy pants. I mean things like that. It was really hard.

Michael refused to spend money to repair the car Mary drove and it made her nervous to drive because she had had so many breakdowns. Undependable transportation limited Mary's visits with friends:

He forced me to drive around in my car that was torn up, ragged. When we moved into a house, we moved about a forty- minute drive out. In less than a year, I broke down six times in my car. But he didn't want to spend the money to fix it. And he wouldn't drive the car. I was the one that had to drive it. So, I was a nervous wreck all the time cause I couldn't go anywhere without worrying that I was going to break down. I mean the car was horrible, horrible. But he would not let me get another car. So, I waited at home until he got done doing everything that he needed to do, like going out to play golf and all that kind of stuff. And only then at that point, if he didn't have anything else to do, I could use the other car and go run my errands. And then of course, he made me feel bad if he wanted to go somewhere and I was using the vehicle. So, I started spending a lot of time sitting at home by myself because I had no way to get anywhere, very isolating.

Mary recalled an episode when she was forced to stand in the cold because Michael was unwilling to take the car to a mechanic:

I waited in the parking deck in the winter for 3 hours for him to come pick me up because my car was broken down. Three hours! After we did that he got my car to Pep Boys, now this was about 8:00 at night. He figured out that it was probably the alternator that was out and he made me stand out at Pep Boys until 10:00 holding a flashlight while he fixed the car in the parking lot. It was about 30 degrees outside (laughs). . . . But he didn't want to spend any money to take the car to a mechanic, so after I'd already waited three hours in the cold, I stood another two or so outside fixing the car. And then a forty minute drive home.

At first Mary saw Michael's micromanagement of her life as evidence that he cared for her. Eventually, her view of his behavior changed:

I didn't see at first, because I thought in the beginning, well he's smart and he's nice. He knows some of what I've been through. He wants to make my life better. He wants to take care of me and make sure that I have what I need but really he wasn't doing that. I mean he was taking and taking and taking and making me feel like I needed a lot less than I really did, if that makes sense. And I'm not talking just materially. But, I mean I thought a lot about that after last time too [refers to first interview] because.....there were these, I mean he was so rigid about *everything* (says with emphasis).

And, I mean just getting in my car I had to have this process where, you know, I got in the car and I turned the car on and I had to wait a certain amount of time before I could drive it. And then once I had been driving it a few minutes, I

could turn the radio on and then I could turn the air conditioner on. Before I turned the car off I had to park, do the brake, turn the radio off, turn the air conditioner off then turn the car off. So I always had these really rigid things I had to do all the time or I got in trouble, you know what I mean? And he did that with everything. And I mean I just didn't, it made me realize how much stress I really was under. I mean I had to be perfect all the time and do things his way all the time.

Michael rarely yelled or said Mary was stupid or crazy but his non-verbal language had an effect on her:

He used a lot of manipulation through silence and.....just the tone in his voice.....I'm trying to even describe it.....Like, like when your parents look at you when you've done something wrong, you know what I mean?

Michael commonly expressed his dissatisfaction through manipulation. Mary recalled his behavior at a party with her co-workers:

Disapproval. Yeah. Like one time we were at a party that was a lot of my friends at work, the people that I work with. He didn't really want to go but he went. So, and just to go back a little bit, I was afraid to be myself at work because I knew that if he was around when I was around the people I worked with, if I acted differently they would know it and he would know it, if that makes sense.

So, we were at this party with a bunch of my friends from work and.....And I was talking to different people and he basically sat in a chair and watched me talk to people. So then we started playing this really funny Mafia game, you try to figure out who's the sheriff And I was sitting beside him

and he, of course, looked bored like he always did because this was not his crowd of people. And he basically sat there the whole time with his arms crossed.....and just watched me. And I mean, just watched.....sulking. And of course if someone talked to him, here comes the charm, you know. Nobody ever saw what he was actually doing. And if I said something he would cut the eyes.

We stayed longer than he wanted to so, the whole way home, pretty much, I got the guilt treatment. Because first of all, he told me that he didn't want to stay that long and then he said, well I didn't want to tell you to leave. But then it was the silent treatment for the rest of the time, the rest of the night, the next day, sometimes two or three days later.

So, on the other side (laughs), if we ever went somewhere and I wanted to go that totally didn't matter. I mean we always had to do things his way so, it was ok for him to do something outside of the plan, but it was not ok for me to do something outside of the plan, if that makes any sense? . . . He was in control. And then he would always say, "Well if you wanted to leave why didn't you tell me?".....Well, I did tell you (laughs). You know, you just chose to ignore what I was saying.

Michael's behavior caused Mary tremendous emotional stress:

I can feel the feeling. I'm trying to think of, I would say it's a combination of that constant (sighs) disapproval and silence and (sighs) like when I had to ask him for money. I mean I would hear it in his voice. And I could feel the tension.....and then I knew when he finally came home that he would begrudge me for it. It, it, does that make sense? I mean that constant.....being scared all the time.....not

that he was going to.....physically hurt me. But it was just so hard to (sighs).....constantly have that hanging over my head.

Michael worked hard to portray himself as a pillar of society and the marital relationship as a close one to the outside world:

And I think that a lot of people, as I've said, have a hard time understanding what it's like having someone control your life who.....on the outside.....is a good member of society and, like I said, wears the right clothes and goes and plays the right sports, and is charming and all that. People do not understand what it's like to live under constant pressure like that. Of having to lie.

I didn't like to go to functions with him. There was a point where I was so depressed and didn't like to be around him so much that I just couldn't do it. But he would make me lie to his friends and say that I was with some other people in a different location at the same event. So he would go see them right before the event and they would always ask about me. And he would say oh she's hanging out with other people on the other side of the event. And I had to lie about that. And say that I was at the event and that I had fun and I didn't even know the outcome of the event (laughs). It was stuff like that all the time.

But he couldn't tell his friends, well she just doesn't feel like coming to this event. There had to be this big elaborate lie to fit into his perfect image of the way things had to be. And that's why I say it is just emotional and mentally, and eventually physically you're just so tired and so drained. You try to care, but on some level you have a hard time even caring because I don't have the energy to care about anything else. I can't even think about anything else, you know? One

other thing might just be too much for me. And, I realize that now. I was so emotional and so sad because I just couldn't physically take it anymore. And one other thing.....it was like another rock being put on the pile. I mean you just get more and more suffocated and more and more closed in and I mean it's just hard to make people understand that especially when an outside image has been portrayed.

Mary had a medical condition, irritable bowel syndrome, that she said was inherited from her Dad. Michael was not helpful or sympathetic when she was ill:

There had to be proof that I was sick. Even though you could tell I was sick, there had to be more than that. And then I knew that when he came home he would ignore me. He wouldn't do anything for me. He wouldn't bring me a glass of water . . . I mean there [were] days that I've crawled [on] to the floor in the kitchen to basically put toast in and sit on the floor and wait for it to get done. And he wouldn't lift a finger to help me.

Michael saw Mary's illness as a weakness and berated her for it:

If I ever got sick, it was the worst. He just absolutely made my life a living hell while I was sick....He wouldn't help me. He didn't want me to go to the doctor...I had to ask him for money to go to the doctor or get medicine, he punished me like it was all in my head.

Spending money on doctors and medicines was, in Michael's view, taking money away from their future plans:

So, I mean there were times when I knew I needed money and I didn't want to ask him for it and . . . then I suffered through the day and I knew that I needed the

medicine and I didn't have the money. And then finally after I made myself a nervous wreck all day to get up the courage to ask him, I'd get punished when he got home. So, I mean it was just the level of stress and pressure, I didn't even realize until it wasn't on me anymore. Which is bizarre to me (laughs) that I couldn't know that, but I really think that I started to realize, I mean a lot of things fell into place that made me start to open my eyes and realize what was going on. During the marriage, Mary experienced depression, anxiety, and physical sickness. She described how the depression and anxiety manifested itself in her life:

It's like if I ever cry about it or if I ever talk about it I will never stop. I will never stop! You know what I mean? (lowers voice) and I knew I was sad and I knew I was depressed. *I knew I was sick* (says with emphasis). I knew I didn't feel well all the time. I didn't want to be around anybody. I didn't want to go to work. I didn't want to be at home (laughs). You know? It's just like you are trapped. I felt like I was under a boulder. And it was squishing the life out of me.

I realize now I had really started having anxiety attacks. And there would be times where I would feel like I just couldn't breathe and there was no air. There was no way out. How was I ever going to get out of this? But I didn't really know why I was feeling all that. You know? Because he had made me feel like.....it was all me.

Michael had final say about the kind of job Mary could take. He decided that going back to school or working at a job that involved art was out of the question for her: Since he was getting settled in his job and he was doing the thing that he wanted to do or whatever I helped him do, that I helped to support him in every way, I

wanted to start to look for something else that was better. No, no, no you can not do that. You need to stay in your job and you need to do this and you need to do that. It was ok for him to take the time for him to find what he needed and wanted to do. I could not have that same time accorded to me. I had also talked about going back to grad school and finishing up my degree. That was totally out of the question. You know you don't need to do that. We don't have the money for that, etc. etc. So couldn't look for another job and I couldn't go back to school, so I was basically suffering in this job that I didn't really like and didn't really care about just because he felt like that's what I should do. So, finally, finally there came a point where he let me quit that job so I could look for another job. When I did that he stayed on me all the time about it. And while I was out there looking for things that I wanted to do [that] involved art and that kind of thing, he was constantly putting that down. So, it got to the point where I was applying for jobs because he wanted me to. He felt like that would be better for me.

So, basically throughout our whole marriage I was applying for jobs and looking for opportunities based on what he thought were ok. He told me basically one of the first things after we got married and came back from our honeymoon, was that if I wanted to pursue art that I could not have him and art, so I needed to choose . . . his dreams and his way of being was the right way and mine was not. So, what do you do? I mean you're married.....chose him.....(laughs). So, pretty much my art dreams went down the drain at that point, because he made me feel like I couldn't do it. I couldn't make it without him.

Control was a major theme in the pattern of abuse Mary experienced. Michael was a perfectionist and things had to be done his way:

I mean I see that now with that level of control that he had to have, he could never leave that job for a minute it seemed. And he would work from seven in the morning till eleven at night sometimes for weeks just because he had to be in control all the time. . . . If I wanted to eat earlier in the day he didn't like that. I needed to wait till nine or ten when he came home to eat with him or he got kind of upset and [gave me the] silent treatment about it. Little sabotages about it all the time. If he didn't want me to do something, if he wanted me to stay up with him and not go to bed, then he kind of made it impossible for me to sleep. . . . He would either be loud or come in the bedroom and turn on the TV and you know, just stuff like that.

As Mary's awareness of his abusive behavior developed, she struggled with a competing view that she was lucky to be with Michael. She realized that he perceived her as "broken" because of the abuse and neglect she experienced as a child.

The emotional abuse in Mary's marriage was both continuous and episodic. It was continuous in that it was a constant presence; it was episodic in that certain issues or situations triggered the intensity of his behaviors. For example, if Mary felt sick, needed to stay home and take care of herself, Michael would:

. . . give me hell until I went to work. So there are times when I was running a fever, and I could barely walk and I couldn't stand in the shower with the flu and I had to go to work to be sent home because I wasn't well enough to be at work. Because it wasn't as bad if I got sent home, he only made me feel bad a little bit

less than normal, if that makes sense. Because at least I could say, well there's proof I'm sick.

The stress of the relationships caused Mary to have anxiety attacks. Her doctor commented that it was unusual for someone her age to have so many serious medical problems. This helped Mary gain perspective on the relationship. She came to believe that some of her medical problems were exacerbated by the abuse.

Michael tried to control Mary's emotional state. There were certain feelings she was not allowed to have: "I could never be sad. I could never be angry. I could never feel bad. You know I could never express any kind of negative emotion."

Michael had a grand plan for their life that dictated when they should buy a house, what kind of house it should be, what activities they should be involved in, the type of people they should be involved with, when they should have children, and how those children should be raised. As the time for children approached, Mary realized that she could never be happy. She wanted to leave:

. . . [H]e tried to cut me just enough so that I would go to work and do my job but then not feel secure in it so I would quit when he wanted me to. And he kept telling me, "Well you know, once the kids are in school then I'll contact this art guy that I know." Cause he knew everybody [through] his law office job. He knew an art guy that could have gotten me a job somewhere, but he didn't, he would not introduce me. So, his theory, you know, his dream was well once the kids get in school and you've got a little bit of time in the morning, I'll talk to this guy in 5 or 6 years and then maybe you can do something on a part-time basis and, you know, while the kids are in school. And I started hearing him say that to

me over and over and I was like, I said it was a gradual process. Why would he be against me doing what I love to do? If he really loved me, you know?

And then you know the pressure came on. He wanted to have kids this year. . . . So, the closer I got to the kid deadline, because literally he had our life planned until we died. Literally! He had a plan. We could not deviate from this plan. I started hearing myself say, “Well, you know, maybe once we have kids, I’ll be happy because I’ll have something to concentrate on.” And then that was like, “Whoa, this is not right.” You never have children cause you think it’s going to fix a relationship. That scared me to death. It terrified me. And then this, it was like my head was spinning. I’ve got to get out of here. I’ve got to get myself out of this marriage before I have a child that’s going to be raised in this atmosphere.

So, then it became [an] urgent, urgent need for me to get out of that relationship. That was the defining moment where I realized I have to be out because I would never want to raise a child in the environment I grew up in. I don’t even really want children. You can not protect children. So why would you want to bring a child into that kind of relationship. I mean, can you imagine, as controlling as he was with me, what it would be like when his child was involved? I would never get away from him and I would never be able to protect a child from him.

Shortly after recognizing that she did not want to have a child, Mary went to her doctor because she was very ill. The conversation she had with him proved to be a turning point:

And I had gone to my doctor and he told me he said, I loved my doctor, by the way, he was great. He said, “You know, Mary, you’re young, you should not be this sick. Are you ok? Is your marriage ok?” And when he said that I was like whoa. My doctor, who I had been going to for a long time, can tell something’s not right in my life. He has no idea and the first thing he asks me is, “Is your marriage ok?” And I’m thinking to myself, “Yeah,” cause I always have to be happy and cheery. And then finally I’m going, “It’s not, it’s not ok.”

Although Mary wanted out of the relationship, she did not know how to leave. So she began to think about what she needed to do to leave:

Because I saw the next.....when a control freak loses control he’s going to do what ever he can do to make sure that you don’t go. And so, I just knew at that point I had to go. And I had to not look back. And we still got together and fought about things. He made me feel horrible and I didn’t know if I was going to make it. I doubted myself and maybe I should go back. Then I thought, No, I am so much more at peace when I’m away from him. I have got to be strong and stay out.

Once Mary decided to leave, she knew that she had to take whatever she really wanted with her immediately. She knew that Michael would prevent her from taking anything later. She described what she took:

So I knew if I didn’t get the important things to me, that I probably would never see them again. . . . So, I took my personal jewelry, a memento of my grandfather, you know, a family bible. I got my clothes, some of my clothes, I got like I said, the things that were most significant and important to me. I packed the car as full

as I could get it and I took the extra key [for the car] and left. He changed the locks. Didn't tell me. Couldn't get in the house. He wouldn't let me go in the house without him being there.

Mary recounted what happened when she went back to collect additional items:

I went back to get some clothes and his dad happened to be there so the door was unlocked. And I went in and started getting some of my stuff and I didn't know it, but his dad called him and had him come out from work to stand there and watch me take my clothes. . . . I went in the bedroom to start packing up some clothes and I heard the phone click, the receiver go down. And not twenty minutes later he showed up...And he actually saw my art materials in the back seat of the car and said, "Well, why are you riding around with your art materials in the car?" Because he circled the car and looked at everything--I mean like I had done something to the car....."Well why are your art materials in the car? Are you working on things again?" And I said as a matter of fact yes. And he said, "Well why are they in the car?" And I said because, I mean I didn't tell him. Just because. He said, "Well why don't you leave the materials here? I'll make sure nothing happens to them." I was like no thanks! There is no way! He knew how important my art was to me. There ain't no way! No way I would leave my materials in his care. When I left I took all my art materials. (laughs) And I know that sounds really weird but I knew they would probably be thrown away or shredded. You know.

Michael made divorce an arduous process, demanding that they go through everything together to make sure that Mary took nothing that belonged to him:

He wouldn't let me take my pictures. We had to look through every picture to make sure they were really mine and were not his. We had to look through every single box. We had to look through every single piece of paper. He wouldn't let me take any of my insurance information. I mean anything that was affiliated with him, that had my name on it as well, I could not take. He had to be in the house to make sure that I got what was mine.

Shortly after Mary left, she hired a lawyer and began taking control of her life again. The first task was to reclaim her paycheck. She was enrolled in an automatic deposit program and if she did not get this changed immediately, her next paycheck would go into her old account which Michael could access. Her lawyer tried to assure her that the money would be recovered if Michael claimed it. But Mary felt that the lawyer did not know Michael the way she did. She explained what happened:

And right after I left him I realized my paycheck was going to go in on that deposit that he was able to access. If I didn't get it, he would get my money. And the lawyer kept saying well if he does, we'll deal with that. We'll get it back for you and all this kind of stuff. I said no, you don't understand. I have to have this money. I have left this man. I have nothing. I have to have this money.

And so I went all over the place. My boss was worried. . . . [T]here was nothing they could do to stop it. Payroll had already gone through so the payroll department couldn't stop it. It was a nightmare that week. I, that was one of the most stressful weeks I ever, ever had. So, we can't actually withdraw money until 9:00, that's when it's available, you know for that day, the last day of the month. So at 9:00 I went to the bank and I cleared my account out.

And I was lucky because it came on a day that I knew he was at a meeting away from his normal workplace. I knew he had these meetings which sometimes went long. . . . So I withdrew everything out of my account. And took it to the other bank where I had opened an account. I didn't have an address so I had to get a post office box. It was this big mess. The [new] bank was actually trying to help me get an account because they knew what was going on.

And he called me later, "Why did you withdraw all your money out of your account?" You know he had already checked that day cause he knew I was going to get paid, to see if my money was there. And I think it upset him that I had taken it out so fast. It was my money. And he was livid that I had taken my money out. He said, "Well I told you I wouldn't take it." I said, "Well I didn't trust you, sorry." So, he couldn't see what I was doing. My money was gone. He couldn't see who I was writing checks to. He couldn't see where I was spending my money on. He didn't know where my account was.

Another difficulty during the divorce was Mary's access to a car. When she left she had taken both sets of keys for the new car because she feared that Michael would take it from her. She knew that he would want the new car and that this would be a contentious issue. Mary prioritized getting out of the marriage over getting her fair share of their property:

And I knew he was dragging it out.....to be mean. And he was going to make me pay and make it as hard as he possibly could. I knew that I deserved money. I knew I deserved that car. I knew I deserved half of whatever he had hidden out there. But to me, none of that was worth it, because I just wanted to be away from

him. He got the house. He got the car, which is what he wanted. He didn't want me to have that car. I couldn't afford the car on my own. He should have been paying for that car, you know, I think, after everything he put me through. But.....to me it was like a non-issue. If you're not going to pay for that car, let me use the car until I can get one. He actually agreed to that which was amazing cause he didn't want to look bad. He knew that if we went to court and he had left me (sighs) homeless and car-less, he knew he would look bad. So, I went out there [and said to Michael], "I found my own car. Here, take your fancy car. . . . [D]rive to your office. Entertain in your home. Whatever. Just.....let me go." That was the bottom line. Just let me go.

Mary's relationship with her lawyer was rocky at first because he did not understand how desperately she wanted out of the marriage. She described her challenge with the attorney:

Well he wasn't even sure that I should be getting divorced at first. . . . Cause he said you know, I always have these clients and they always decide, they get half way through it and they decide to reconcile. And I said no this is not going to happen. And when I told him just a few of the things that I had gone through. And I said, you know every time he walks in a room, my entire body from my head to my toes, every muscle in my body is rock-solid. He makes me that uncomfortable. I can not stand to be around him any more which is hard when you love somebody and you can't stand them at the same time. What's up with that.

And [the attorney] said that when I said that, he knew that I couldn't even be in a room with him [Michael]. He knew. He's like this is really, you know,

she's not just emotional and coming in and whatever. This is really a bad marriage and he realized of course, you need to be away from this man . . . because I had a male lawyer like I said that didn't really get it at first. But then over time he got it. This man is too controlling. He monitors everything.

Perception of Self

When asked about her self-perception, during the marriage Mary commented that, "In a way I almost had no perception of myself. . . . Because I had lost myself, you know? I mean I wasn't myself. He told me what I was." She doubted herself totally:

I had lost any sense of being intelligent or being worth anything or my opinions counting for anything. I had just kind of become a a Stepford wife. That's what I was! (laughs) That's exactly what I was. Where you just kind of feel like you're turned off and you're going through the motions. And you're just trying to make it through the next day. I mean I don't remember, I mean I think I kidded myself a lot. I don't remember a time where I actually thought I, damn, I'm so happy (laughs).

Mary speculated about what might have happened had she remained in the marriage:

And I can honestly say that if I had stayed in that marriage, and it had been a twenty-year marriage, I probably would have killed myself by the end of it, do you know what I mean? Not that I ever thought of that during that time. But once you're out and you realize how unhappy you are, to imagine myself with him for the next twenty years, I think I would have just said, ok, I can't take this anymore. You know? There wouldn't have been anything left. And if there was anything left, I would have just been a zombie I think. And I don't know if that sounds

really over dramatic, but...And then you think of putting children in to that scenario and trying to protect them from all that. I mean that, that would have, I would have been in a mental institution (laughs).

To the outside world, including her family, Michael looked like the “perfect catch” and her life looked ideal. This made it difficult to trust her thoughts and feelings that the relationship was a toxic one:

And you don’t realize it. And when you finally do realize you’re in a bad situation, it’s like, well, everybody else thinks he’s nice. And everybody else thinks he’s perfect. Maybe I’m just crazy. You know, what am I? Why do I not feel the way other people think I should feel? I mean you really question everything. And I think that was part of the problem was that in my family’s eyes and everyone else’s eyes he was the perfect catch. But they didn’t have to live with him either (laughs). And they didn’t know how unhappy I was.

Mary had difficulty describing how she saw herself after she left the relationship: Honestly I don’t think I felt anything for awhile. I had shut down as much as a person has to shut down. It was very, very, very, very hard. . . . I mean it’s hard to even put in to words, cause it just.....(sighs).....it was like I almost had to, it was like cutting a part of your body away. Like cutting an arm off or a leg off. Or a cancer (laughs).....It was pretty much like that. I mean I had to just shut as much as I could down so I could just even cope with it. It was just very, very hard for me because of that.

Although Mary did not abuse alcohol and had not had anything to drink for years, she started drinking a couple of beers at night to help her sleep.

Eventually Mary began to feel sane again. There was calm and peace in her life: I think I've settled down. And I still have good days and bad days. But definitely more good. And the further I get away from it, the more that I realize that it wasn't really me so much that destroyed his life. I mean he almost destroyed mine and I've always been a very strong person because I've had to be.

Getting out of the relationship was more important than getting her fair share of what they had accumulated as a couple.

Mary still finds herself struggling to make decisions about her purchases. This is an emotional artifact of the abuse. She understands that learning to trust herself to make good decisions is a process:

But I'm not depending on someone to take care of me in a relationship. I'm still going to the grocery store and getting what I want. And I'm spending my money where I want to. And I'm making friends that I want to make. I'm not having to be his friends' friend. If I want to go out with a friend of mine, I go out with a friend of mine. You know what I mean? I guess that's what I'm trying to say. It's hard to let yourself trust yourself. And my therapist, I think that was a big point that he brought up to me in one of our sessions was that.....are you having trouble trusting other people or are you having trouble trusting your own judgment? And I thought about that a lot. I mean I've had these (laughs) epiphanies, here and there. But I mean that was a huge point in that you have to get to a point where you trust yourself and you trust your judgment to be able to move on from something like that. So, and that's a hard, hard thing to do when

someone tells you everyday that you're not capable of trusting your judgment because they know better.

Mary's family has emotionally supported her since she left the relationship. Co-workers at her old job have also been an emotional anchor. Work was the one place where Mary felt successful. The validation that she was doing a good job and that she was competent was an invaluable counterpoint to Michael's perspective. Mary refused to give into to Michael's negative view of her:

But I mean I could be a really bitter mean bitchy person all the time if I sat back and let all that stuff [all the difficult things that have happened in her life] control my life every day. And I'm just not going to let that happen. And I even had someone ask me, well how can you be nice to people when you know that they're.....not being true or whatever. Because I chose that. You know, if someone's mean to me I chose my reaction. I can either let it ruin my day or I can say, whatever.

A hopeful attitude was something Mary developed in childhood that also helped her get through the marriage. There were times when she was dealing with her mentally ill parent that, "I always had that just tiny bit that kept me going, that could see that there would be something better on the other side."

Mary's job and the help she gives people helps to move her beyond the abuse. She has gotten good evaluations at her old job and her new one. She got rid of possessions that reminded her of Michael and the marriage. She has begun seeing someone who is supportive of her and her art, is courteous, cares about her safety but does not monitor her behavior. She cares a great deal for her new boyfriend but is also working hard to

maintain her independence and separateness. Mary is reclaiming the parts of her life that were diminished in her marriage.

Alice

Alice was a warm, friendly 39-year-old single mother. During the interview she described herself as a “big girl,” who had always been big. A conscientious person, Alice got up at one point to adjust the air conditioner to minimize noise interference with the microphone.

Alice’s son was preschool-age but not home at the time of the interviews. His pictures covered the walls. Child-sized plastic table and chairs in bright red, green, yellow, and blue sat along a wall. There was a comfortable clutter in the living/dining room area where the interviews were conducted at a maple-stain wooden table.

Like the others, Alice expressed an interest in participating in the study to help women who have experienced emotional abuse. She also hoped to explore what had happened in her own experience.

Alice spoke with excitement about her classes and the work that lay ahead in her graduate program. She is pursuing a Ph.D. and aspires to an academic career. Alice moved to Georgia from a nearby state to attend graduate school, to focus on her life priorities, and to get away from Elliot, her ex-partner who is her son’s father. Balancing the desire to have no interaction with Elliot with the contact Alice felt she must have because of their son is on-going challenge.

Family of Origin

Alice grew up in an intact family of four with an unconventional mother who worked full-time outside the home as a social worker. She also exposed Alice to

women's issues, taking her as a girl to pro-choice rallies and to hear important feminist activists. Despite her mother's seemingly feminist consciousness, the advice she gave Alice about the relationship with Elliot was contradictory. Alice explained:

This is not a stupid woman. This is a social worker (laughs). She is a L.C.S.W. She's a bright woman. This is the same woman that took me to see Margaret Mead when I was a kid and Gloria Steinem and pro-choice rallies!...I mean there I was and she just has this.....(sighs) I mean, "Nurture his ego, Alice" that's what she tells me. . . . That's what men need.

To Alice's bewilderment, her mother discouraged independence and encouraged her to compromise by lowering her expectations in the relationship. Alice's mother was impressed by Elliot's professional status--he was an attorney--and financial success.

Alice hid information about Elliot's emotionally abusive behavior from her family. Only recently has she shared with her father and brother that Elliot has a drug problem. She still has not told her mother. Alice acknowledged that she has been a "buffer" between Elliot and her family, especially her mother.

In the last few years, Alice has recognized similarities in her mother's and Elliot's treatment of her: "Now I look at both and I see very glaring patterns. Um, the constant criticism, the nothing's ever going to be good enough.....attitude from both of them."

Significant Relationships

Alice estimated that she had dated over 25 people but her serious relationships have been much fewer in number. She has been married twice. The first marriage was in her early twenties to a man named Tom. They dated for a couple years and were married a couple years. Alice said that they "had had an ideal courtship...but had no business

getting married.” The divorce was amicable; Tom was a terrific person; and they are still in contact today. Alice initiated the divorce and left the relationship feeling good about herself.

Six years later, Alice married again. She was in her late twenties when she met Ken. Alice described it as a “whirlwind”; “I knew [him] for six months. I married him and the marriage lasted two months.” One morning after Ken kissed her good bye and left for work, a deputy came to the door and served her divorce papers one half hour later. Alice was shocked and did not know why Ken wanted a divorce. She got an annulment and a year later learned from Ken’s relatives that he was gay.

Unlike with the first divorce, Alice experienced a great deal of pain when the second marriage ended. She said it was the “peak trauma” of her life. She doubts she will marry again because she could never trust again. For Ken, Alice had moved across country, disconnected from all that she knew, and taken a marginal job. After the annulment, she moved back to the Southeast where she had lived previously and reconnected with her old support system. The second marriage and subsequent annulment, she believed, left her “vulnerable.”

Alice’s relationship with Elliot began a year after the annulment. Her best friend worked with him and introduced them. Alice’s initial reaction to Elliot was positive, however, she later learned that he had not been entirely truthful:

Was I impressed that I was going out with a lawyer? (hits table) *Yes I was!* (says with emphasis) Was my mom impressed? *Yes she was!* (says with emphasis) (laughs) There’s no question. He’s young handsome, we started dating, and he lies about his age. He lies about his age because he’s (calculates in her head) let

me see, he'll be 47 next week. And so nine years ago he was 36. And he told me he was like 31, 32. And, yeah, I mean, he, there he was a new, young, fresh, first job. Yes I was impressed! I'm still impressed.

The relationship became serious after a year of dating.

Alice described their relationship as perpetually on and off. At times Elliot dated other women and a few times she dated other people. None of the outside relationships were as serious. Alice and Elliot never lived together, although they talked occasionally about making a long-term commitment.

Elliot made a practice of alternating between being very present in Alice's life and being out of touch. She explained: "I mean it was more than sex but it, it wasn't a commitment. And he would go away for a week at a time. I wouldn't hear from him. And it just kind of.....I kind of tolerated it."

The relationship lasted over seven years and ended during Alice's pregnancy. For a while she had no contact with Elliot, although he paid child support. Before leaving for graduate school, she called to let him know that she and her son were moving.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

Because Alice is a helping professional, she has some awareness of the definition and signs of emotional abuse. While in the relationship with Elliot, she sensed at some level that it was abusive, it has been easier to see patterns in hindsight. Alice believed that her training was a help and a hindrance:

I mean, I mean it (sighs) that has probably been my greatest asset in life, but it's also been my greatest problem...I think when you're in the caring or helping profession fields, then you tend to think that you can just solve everybody's

problems and that you just have to be supportive and he'll come around. Or you know, if you just show him unconditional love, he'll learn. And um, that's hard. That's very difficult and I think the reason why I took his threats when he did threaten me when I was pregnant so seriously is that I've sat across the table from too many women that have said, "I didn't take him serious." And they should have. And I did.

When asked to give her definition of emotional abuse, Alice emphasized the importance of intention behind the abuser's words and actions. Emotional abuse was, she believed, ". . . [W]here they do it with the expressed intent to jar you or think that they're going to jar you or upset you or whatever."

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Elliot directed at Alice included: belittling, yelling, calling her names, criticizing, accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him, discounting, negating her feelings or ideas, verbally attacking, having unrealistic expectations, saying negative things about her sexually, sulking, withholding affection from her, ignoring, slamming doors or objects, ridiculing, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, expressing excessive jealousy, threatening her life or the life of children, pets, or family, labeling her in a negative way, and blaming her for his problems. He also accused her of trying to hurt him by becoming pregnant.

Alice also added one behavior after she had completed the original Checklist: "does things to elicit jealousy." She explained:

"I don't know what you would call it when, when someone calls you and says, uhm, 'You know, I'm in another relationship.' And they do it intentionally to hurt

you or to get a rise out of you, to get a response. And then you find out it's completely bogus.

It upset Alice when Elliot talked about his involvement with other women. On the other hand, he was jealous of Alice's relationships with others.

Alice was most deeply affected by Elliot's "constant criticism," which was something she had experienced with her mother. According to Elliot, Alice said, "I couldn't be enough. I wasn't going to be enough. Um.....criticizing about my weight.Those were probably the most painful." Elliot had unrealistic expectations of her, Alice remarked: "Well, yeah, I think he's still looking for the 5' 10" Ph.D. that makes \$200,000 a year."

Alice believed that the on-again, off-again pattern of their relationship fueled the emotional abuse:

. . . [T]here you would have these periods of niceties, when things were going smoothly and then either he wanted to just be left alone. And so he created a little crisis to make that happen.

When she became pregnant, Alice was upset and concerned about how the community would judge her:

I was so scared when I thought I was pregnant. So scared. I was just so scared. Because I don't care what they say, there's still a stigma out there attached to women that are pregnant and not married. See now, [her son is a preschooler] people just assume I'm divorced.

She and Elliot had talked about having children and pregnancy was always a possibility because they never used birth control. He seemed pleased about this possibility before it happened:

We didn't use birth control *ever* (says with emphasis). And we had talked, at one time he reached over and said, "Well when are we going to get married? Well you know, I want children." And I was like, "Well I want children." And he . . . said, "Well you haven't gotten pregnant so we don't have any children." And we talked that if we ever did get married we probably have to deal with infertility and all that crap.

When Alice conceived, Elliot was supportive initially:

And he was so (says with emphasis) wonderful in the beginning. The night I found out he brought over, he went out and bought children's movies and came over and we watched children's movies. And he was just so sweet.

As the reality of having the child approached, Elliot changed. In fact, he saw the pregnancy as Alice's way of harming him:

And it was almost like he was sweet up until the time when I couldn't have an abortion. He was sweet up until that time. Yes. And then when I got the amnio(centesis) results done (inhales) and it was all normal and everything, it was, (lowers voice) it was shortly after that that he just kind of said, 'Well I don't want to be a dad.' At four months pregnant it's too late. Can't decide that.

.....So.....I forced parenthood on him. (raises voice) So yeah, he'd probably call that emotionally abusive.

Elliot's mixed messages continued as the pregnancy progressed. Alice became frightened. She recalled a disturbing incident where she felt:

I was seven months pregnant and we had just come back from Disney World. He took me there for mother's day weekend. And I don't know if he had been using [illicit drugs] that particular day or what. But he called and he just told me to look out that I'm going to be sorry I ever met him and da da da da da and get a restraining order, get a restraining order, get a restraining order. And I did. I marched down the next morning and got a restraining order.

Because Elliot moved from one extreme to another in his interactions, Alice thought he might be bipolar:

. . . [H]e would tell me I was just the most beautiful sexual being when I was pregnant. And he would sometimes treat me just.....like a queen. And then he would go to the polar opposite. Uh, he never called me names while I was pregnant. I've always been a big girl. And after I had my son, there were some words to that effect about fat bitch or you just have no control and da da da da da and all of that. But then at other times, "Well you know your weight doesn't bother me." And then I would, would, I'd know he was dating someone that was just exquisitely beautiful. But that wouldn't last either.

Alice spent years trying to make sense of Elliot's behavior and what it meant for their relationship:

Well, at first I thought he was just.....unable to commit and that's why he disappeared for periods of time. He, we'd have an incident and then he'd disappear. Or else he'd just disappear and I'd get pissed off. And.....then I found

out about the illicit drug use. So then that, I blamed that for everything. And then I found out what a wretched horrible childhood he had, so then I blamed that for everything. Poor Elliot. I'm going to help Elliot because he's a good soul. He's a gentle soul. And he really is a sensitive person.And over the last, since I've moved, I've kind sa, been able to take a step back and sa, say well, you know, a lot of people have shitty childhoods. Yours wasn't any worse than anybody else's for the most part I don't think based on what I know it wasn't. And.....I don't know. I guess at 47 years old he needs to figure out what he's going to do and where he's going to take it. The question is how?

Alice had a difficult time separating from Elliot even though she knew that getting out of the relationships was best for her. She turned to therapy for help, "I spent.....several years in therapy trying to figure out a way out of the relationship. And there's too, he has a draw, he still has a draw." Because there had been no physical abuse, this made it harder for Alice to cut the tie. Had there been physical abuse, Alice believed that she would have left sooner. She explained, "I would have almost rather him hit me.Because I think then I would have maybe been able to kick him out." On the other hand, Alice wondered whether she would have severed the relationship had it become physically violent given her background as a helping professional and her long-standing desire to help people.

Geographical distance has helped her gain perspective on the relationship and learn to hold Elliot accountable for his decisions and behavior:

Uhhmmm, again and I hate to keep saying the same thing over and over. I think the distance has made things easier for me and it's also made things easier to just

distance myself both physically and emotionally. And (stammers)the other thing I need to do is to stop coming up with reasons for his behavior. You know, he needs to be responsible for his behavior. (sighs) I guess I'm just amazed at his selfishness which I'd never really (stammers) I guess I never knew he was as selfish as he is.

Alice thought the abuse had affected the relationship over time, She said: "It perpetuated it! I didn't put a stop to it and I didn't set any limits." There has always been a struggle to keep the boundaries clear and consider the needs of her son:

There was this constant running, running back whenever he wanted me to. And then I would retreat and then he would chase. And then he would retreat and I would chase and it was just this horrible cat and mouse game. And.....I.....you get a lot of shame when you realize what you accepted. I know I have.

Perception of Self

Alice's perception of herself was affected by the relationship. She remembered being immobilized:

It sucks. I think that's one of the hardest when you look internally and you try to figure out what makes you stay. And then you feel like a loser because you stay.

And you feel like a loser.....because you can't leave. You can't put a stop to it.

When the relationship ended she, "...was actually very happy." Getting away from Elliot raised her spirits: "Moving away just helped me distance. Helped me to make a decision to take care of myself."

When asked how she saw herself now, Alice reported that she fluctuates:
 Depends on which day you catch me. Unfortunately, (laughs), today's not a very good day!I would see myself as a confident bright woman. And.....I see myself as being.....excellent at my career.....I'm at the top of my career where I was. And now I'm pursuing higher education. But it's still never going to be enough.

Not being involved with Elliot has improved Alice's well-being:

I've made the decision we're not going to see each other. I'm happier. And that hasn't happened that often. It's happening now. And so I'm hoping to see a little curve upwards as far as you know, self-esteem, competence and things like that.

Alice described herself as a good person with good intentions whose tendency to "people please," contributed to her involvement with Elliot. She explained: "I've learned that good people tend to allow this to happen because they want everybody to be happy.....And we tend to treat other people like we want to be treated."

Alice's friends were instrumental in helping her to deal with and move through the emotional abuse. The friend that introduced Alice to Elliot worked with him. That friend recognized the problems in his behavior and has supported Alice. Other friends have been supportive as well:

I have the best friends in the whole wide world. They hate him (laughs) and but I give them so much credit because no matter how often I call.....they're still there. And they don't, "Oh, you've been down this road before!" They don't beat me up as much as I beat myself up about being in the same place *again and again and again* (says with emphasis). And I'm grateful for that. My

family.....probably they're not as aware.....So I don't think I get much support from my family. But I get great support from my friends.

Alice has limited the information she has given family members about Elliot's behavior. Only recently did she disclose his illicit drug abuse problems to her father and brother. She has not told her mother about the drugs and no family member knows about the emotional abuse.

Alice believed that her personal and professional goals will help her move beyond the abuse and towards financial security. She suspects that Elliot may not always pay child support. When or if this happens, she wants to be self-sufficient: “. . . I think I've just been able to set my own professional goals as far as making some career moves where I won't have to be dependent on him even financially.” She has chosen a career with her son's needs in mind:

What is the best route to make a good salary and also be able to provide a good living, a good type of living for my child? And I thought—academia. Cause then I'll have my summers off most of the time. And I'd have my weekends off, for most part my evenings. It's, you know, I think it's a great way of life and I think it will be good for my son. I think the environment's a healthy one. And that's what I wanted for him.

Vicki

Vicki was a 40-year-old single mom with an infectious laugh. She was warm, friendly, and easy to talk to. Vicki suffered from a thyroid condition that caused her to be heavier than she would have liked and that left her feeling tired. She was a nurse in an area hospital and liked her job, but expressed a desire to do something different.

Vicki has a teenage son and daughter. She was clearly proud and excited about them. She has been single for nearly all of their lives. She plans to complete her degree after her children are grown.

The interviews took place on weekend afternoons in a peaceful office setting. Vicki made herself comfortable leaning back into the cushions along the back of the sofa. She sat a glass of water on an adjacent table. Although she had a southern accent, the rapidity of her speech was reminiscent of the fast talk identified with other sections of the country.

Vicki had done a great deal of thinking about her emotionally abusive marriage and the interviews offered another opportunity to reflect on her experience. She has wanted to raise women's consciousness of emotional abuse.

Vicki divorced over a decade ago. She was not in a relationship at the time of the interviews, although she has had relationships periodically.

Family of Origin

Vicki is the middle child with an older and a younger brother. She was very close to her younger brother when she was young. Now she is closer to her older brother.

Vicki identified her father as emotionally abusive. She said, "I have to say my dad is emotionally abusive in some ways. Not as extreme as Donny [her ex-husband]." She was pained by her dad's criticism:

Once I was about 12, 13, you know, when kids get that rebellious. He just couldn't deal with me talking back and my brothers never did. (laughs) They were guys and they just didn't do stuff like that. My oldest brother was kind of a whiz-kid genius and he kept to himself. They knew everything that went on with me.

And they were more involved interpersonally with me.....but I think it was because they were very protective and I was the only girl, the middle child, you know, baby for awhile. But yeah, I think that's why it bothered me. I think that's where my sensitivity to being criticized [comes from] or even just constructive criticism kind of bugs me. But reprimands or orders or tone of voice, it bothers me more than probably other people.

Vicki's father was also critical of her mother:

And he's that way with my mother. I used to think my dad was normal. But now that I'm older I see where sometimes he can be pretty mean to my mother. He's never been physically abusive. . . . I pointed this out to my mother a lot. "Why do you let him talk to you this way? Why do you let him criticize you? Why does he always have to say, "Yes, you can go here" and "No, you can't." And she said, "Well he's just getting old and grumpy."

Her father's criticism continued into Vicki's adulthood. When she was struggling emotionally after her divorce, he told her: "You're not the only person it's happened to. Get over it. You need to get back to work."

Claiming her personal autonomy and dealing with her parents has been a major challenge for Vicki:

We [she and her parents] just can't live under the same roof (laughs). So I figured since I had finished school I was going to get a job at the local hospital. And I just felt that wasn't far enough for me to start over so that [is] why I moved where I live [to the town she lives in now]. And that was scary but I had the confidence by then, that I was able to do it and take care of myself. Of course my family, my

mom and dad [said], “Well now you can’t do na na na na, you can’t do this, you can’t do that”. That’s just the story. That’s just how they’ve always been. “You’re not capable. You have the kids. What are you going to do if this happens and that happens.” And of course whenever things would happen and I’d have to call them for help I would have that little rebellious attitude. (sighs) Oh, you know, I hate having to call them for help. But I felt like that was a big deal to move by myself even though it’s still relatively close to where my parents live.

Vicki explained why the move was important:

I had to do it. I had to prove to myself that I could take care of myself.....and I felt like I can’t stay here for other people. I need to do what I need to do and establish my own territory or whatever. And so I felt really good when I moved.....I was scared but I also felt very empowered and met a bunch of people at work. And I’d say it was pretty good.

Her father’s controlling attitude influenced her career choices:

I had worked at child abuse shelter. And (sighs) I felt very pressured by my father because I moved back home [and] he was like, “You need to just get a real job and quit playing around with those day camp and shelters,” you know, he’s just that way. So, I talked to some friends of mine and they were like, “Well, why don’t you go into the medical field. Nursing is good. You know, there’s a nursing school and nnnah, nnah.” And I was like, “Well, what the hell? Why not?” You know? And I applied and I got in which surprised me. I think looking back it’s just really not what I wanted to do but I felt very pressured to do something where

I could take care of myself, you know, make enough money to take care of myself.

I felt very pressured that you know, I had no choices. I'm stuck here. And this is what I have to do. And I guess, too, having kids added to the pressure of I'm stuck here. I can't change anything because the uncertainty of what am I going to do? How am I going to make enough money was very scary to me. So that's where all my anxiety was coming from. And so, yeah at that point, I felt like I had a lot of friends and was independent but I also felt very stuck and very nervous and anxious about things going wrong at work. It was mostly to do with work. And that basically you know, my whole life would fall a part if I screwed up at work is the way I looked at it.

Her mother also made critical comments that undermined Vicki's autonomy and self-esteem. She heard her mother tell a friend who was visiting:

"Yeah, well, we got rid of Donny. And I told Vicki the next time I get to pick who it is." Oh my God, I just (laughs and shakes head). I argue with my dad but I never argue with my mom because she gets *so hurt* (says with emphasis). And so I just didn't say anything. And I mean it hurt for her obviously to say that. They have absolutely no confidence in me at all as far as making decisions or being a grownup or you know.

But you know, it was kind [of] weird, and I mean little things like that come up over the years. "Now don't go screwing this up! Don't go messing this up!" You know? When I changed jobs I tried to explain to them it wasn't just because I didn't like where I was. It was just a matter of something I wanted to

do. It was an opportunity and that.....and they still [said], “Now, don’t go making people mad. And don’t get people mad at you.” (grunts) It’s like yes mam, you know, yes sir, I’m only twelve, you know.....the older I get the more dysfunctional I realize my family is. You know, not in the stereotypical alcoholism or physical abuse or sexual abuse or anything like that. But they don’t communicate like normal people should. Or the way I would like it, I should say. What Vicki learned from her mother about being a woman set the stage for later relationships with men:

. . . [M]y mother.....in an indirect way didn’t sit down and tell me all these things but her actions and her attitudes have caused me to have a lot of conflict with what the woman’s role is in society and what my own thoughts have been. And I feel like I wasn’t you know rebel enough to overcome those things like you know, you’re supposed to find the perfect man. And take him for all his faults and do what he wants. You know let him be the guide of where the relationship and where your life is going. And my mom uses the terms that she worshipped her grandfather and her father, which I always thought was really strange, cause I never felt that way about my father. I loved him but I never thought he was the be all end all you know. And I don’t understand that way of thinking but I also feel like I’ve let men and then it carries over to authority figures, dominate me.

It makes me angry (sighs) and society especially here in the South. I heard a lot, growing up, about girls aren’t supposed to do this and girls aren’t supposed to do that and that’s weird that you think that way. When I was younger my friends used to kind of joke around about me being the free spirit, carefree kind

of, (raises voice). It's funny that they perceived, everybody perceives me that way, but I don't. I feel like I had that in me but I never let it actually totally come out because I always felt pushed down by either parents or boyfriends or.....responsibilities. I mean there were times where I had a taste of that and I would just be elated and just wow, this is so cool, this is the way I want to be. Vicki's low self-esteem and atypical interests also affected her view of herself: And so my perception of myself has always been a lot lower than other people that know me real well. But yeah the cultural thing [the way females are socialized]. That definitely influenced my actions more than my thoughts. And I felt like I was [in] a struggle throughout most of my life. It's being a girl but wanting to do non-girl things.

For example, Vicki's unconventional choice of an instrument did not meet family expectations:

Well, for example, when I was a kid I wanted my, you know, I was always into music. I loved music. And my mom encouraged that because she's very creative and had a lot of artistic talents and stuff too, but, which she doesn't do anymore. And I kind of inherited that. So she encouraged that a lot but when I got to middle school it was like, ok you can be in band, you want to play flute.....or clarinet? And I wanted to play drums. You know, girls don't play drums. And it was *a battle* (says with emphasis). I had to fight for that. And then my parents still, sort of blew it off, like, "Oh God, why does she always have to be different?"

Vicki also enjoyed hiking and camping. She often took her younger brother with her:

I never was really sports oriented but when I was in high school, before it was kind of popular for people to be outdoorsy, I was always going off with my dog and hiking and camping. I dragged my little brother everywhere. He was my best buddy. I mean I'd take him, anybody didn't want to go, my little brother came with me. And I'd take him to concerts and outdoor festivals and just tons of stuff like that. I'd take him camping and hiking with me all the time.

It was difficult to get her female friends enthused about these activities. Vicki recalled, “. . . [M]y friends were more, you can't plug a hairdryer in out in the woods. So they weren't in to that.”

Significant Relationships

Vicki estimated she has been involved in twelve relationships, six of which were serious. They ranged in length from six months to two years, except for the four-year relationship with her husband. In general, none of Vicki's relationships were casual:

Actually, I would say all, anytime I was involved with anybody it was monogamous. I never really dated several people at a time.” They also became close quickly: “Uh.....um.....let's see.....I would say in most people's opinion probably fairly soon maybe within three months.

Vicki had a preference for men whom she described as counter-culture types: I liked to meet people who like to do what I like to do. And a lot of times that was the basis for my introductions to guys was we liked the same music or I don't know they either.....they were just weird, I mean a lot of them were nice. But you know it just didn't work out. Some of them were just way out there.

Unfortunately those were the ones I was really attracted to that you know.

Tim, a boyfriend Vicki had in college, was typical. He was her “first serious” boyfriend. She thought, “he was so cool but he was extremely free spirited and artsy.” But it was difficult to know where she stood with Tim. Vicki often felt frustrated:

. . . [H]e was so manipulative with his charm but also always keeping things up in the air. Never, he was never, not really good at sticking to anything, you know, and no commitment and yet, one day it was all I love you and I want us to get married but it was more idealistic. And I was pretty young . . . but thinking back, you know he was very manipulative.

He was so much fun but he was just so out there, you know, all over the place. And he was manipulative but not mean about it. It was just sneaky and underhanded you know. Playful but also he would talk me into doing things for him going way out of my way to do things for him. And that’s what got on my nerves with him.

Donny, her ex-husband, was a departure from the other men Vicki had dated. He had been married before and had two young daughters who lived with their mother in another state. Not artsy or musical, he was more conventional in his views and behavior. He was “mainstream”:

Now my ex-husband was very opposite of that. He was very clean cut. He was a fireman. I thought.....because of all that and because he was more.....that he was going to be “the normal guy” and “the accepted one” because he’s what people would think that. He’s what the image that I thought people would think I should go for. Because he was, you know, not all long hair (laughs) stuff like that. So I think that’s what threw me for a loop with him.

Donny intensely focused on Vicki. She found this new experience thrilling:

. . . [T]hat he paid so much, God when we first met he was just so.....(stammers) enthralled with me. It was weird. It was like I never had anybody treat me like that. . . . Oh! Just overflowing with emotional this and that and talking all the right lines. And I just had never met anybody quite that intense. So I thought well that must be what happens when you meet the perfect person. And then of course his flaws started coming out but by then I was, I don't know, looking back I really don't know why.....I let myself get so caught up with him.

At first, Donny seemed to represent stability--the kind of man with whom you would settle down. Many of her friends were married or in the process of getting married and she felt pressured to do the same:

. . . [C]ause one of my friends was already married. The other one had dated this guy for like three years and he was a doctor. And he was clean cut and all. My [older] brother was married. Everybody I knew was married. And I think I felt the pressure that you know, I want to be normal. I want to fit in (laughs). And here's a guy that crazy about me and can't live without me or whatever. He's very clinging which surprised, I guess that's what it was that did it. Because the other guys were more independent. I was independent and they were independent.

Vicki married Donny when she was 26 or 27 after dating him for a year. At the time of the interviews, Vicki had been divorced from him for more than ten years. The divorce was unpleasant but it had happened quickly. Child support payments were the only connection remaining between them. By choice Donny had little contact with their children.

Vicki has dated since the divorce. Some relationships have lasted longer than others, but none have really worked.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

Vicki talked about her relationships with Tim and Donny simultaneously because of similarities in her emotional experience:

I mean it's kind of interesting, cause it's like they were so different but my feelings were always that anxiety, I don't know what's going on. I'm up in the air all the time. I can't seem to pin'em down.

Tim withheld affection and sex:

Come to think of it if he wouldn't say it directly like in a mean way but.....it was kinda going along with the ignoring or the he was almost like a narcissist or something. Like, I'm so important and you're lucky to have me around attitude. And I may or may not let you. You know I may do you a favor. . . . [H]e was he was extremely smart that's, you know, the big difference between he and Donny. There were times when I would want affection and because he [Tim] was mad, he wouldn't show anger or he would just ignore or distance himself from me.

Donny was also manipulative with affection and sex:

So it was always withholding affection. Donny, well it was funny, he thought he was real affectionate but it was manipulative. The goal was sex regardless of what. It was like a child in that, "Well if I did this for you, then you owe me," kind of thing. He definitely withheld affection cause we could never just have an affectionate time without it having to lead to sex. He was, I mean personally I think he was addicted, he had an addictive personality. But I sort of reasoned that

out, he was just a sex addict as well as an alcoholic, more of a binge drinker, though.

Tim and Donny were both critical of Vicki but their strategies were different:

Tim would be more like you should learn more about this. You should try doing, you know, learn more about literature. You need to know more about socially correct things, I guess. He would, you know, the isolating from friends and family I guess they were similar that way.

Now, Donny was mean with his criticism it was usually in anger. “You’re so stupid. I can’t believe you, blah, blah, blah. You know, how could you do this, how could you do that.” Looking for things to pick fights with. But Tim was more putting me down in a way that was making me feel like I was not smart enough or good enough.

They both isolated Vicki from friends and family:

. . . [Tim] would just manipulate my time. Or, you know, “I’m going to go out with my friends” or . . . ”Well I really need you to help me do so and so,” you know. “I thought you were going to spend time with me,” that kind of stuff. And Donny, he did that more . . . “You’re not going to go anywhere” or, well I told you about the graduation thing. He was more like, “You’re going to have to stay home with the kids or you’re going to have to (stammers) you can’t go to your parents” or, “I don’t want your friends coming over cause I’m sick,” or stuff like that.

The demands they placed on Vicki interfered with her opportunities or responsibilities:

[Both of them would] procrastinate until I was late for work. Make sure they got what they needed to do, it didn't matter if I was late for work or class. Accuse you of repeatedly and purposely, yeah sometimes they would say, "Because you're being selfish," that was their favorite, I remember (laughs). "Well you're being selfish wanting to do so and so. "And that's going to, that hurts my feelings, that you don't consider my feelings above yours or your friends or your family's".

Tim and Donny had unrealistic expectations:

. . . [B]oth of them were very way out there as far as, "Well I have this great idea. I'm going to get involved with this money-making scheme and we're going to be rich. Or I'm going to win the lottery and we're going to have millions of dollars." And they would, I remember them both doing, it was so strange, they both did this, make lists of all the things they were going to buy. (sighs) And you know and my ex-husband [Donny] was still doing that even after years. You know, he would owe me child support. We went through a lot of issues. And currently I've filed a contempt through . . . the state of [where he lives currently] and it's just taken a long time. But they were like, "I can just work extra jobs or I'll be getting this money from so and so and I'll give you extra," or . . . two or three times Donny has told me over the years when he's on his manipulative, guilty little vein that he does every once in awhile. Like, "I've treated you so bad, you and the kids and I'm going to make it up to you someday when I become a millionaire because I'm hooked up with this guy that's," you know like, whatever. That's very unrealistic.

And Tim was the same way. He wanted to be a writer (lowers voice). And I would even try to be the voice of reason, which I really didn't like doing. I like to have my little daydreams, too, you know. But I always felt that I had to be the mom or the voice of reason like, "Well but what if that doesn't work out?" Then of course that was me discounting their dreams and, "You know, you just don't have faith in me," stuff like that.

Tim and Donny repeatedly threatened to abandon Vicki: ". . . [A]bandon you, yeah, anytime they got mad both of them, "Well, if you don't like it, you can just leave. I don't want to deal with this anymore. I'm outa here." Real quick to say that." Neither had any qualms about interfering with Vicki's sleep or other responsibilities:

. . . [T]hey didn't think anything of waking me up out of a sound sleep to either ask me to take them somewhere or to go get them something or to have sex. . . . All the time I mean I almost got to the point where I thought, "Well this must be normal," I don't know, you know (laughs)? This must be the way people are. And I'd get mad sometimes, but usually with my ex-husband [Donny], I would just give in. I mean that goes along with his whole, I mean he would just pitch fits. And it was like, ok, it's easier to just go ahead and get it over with. That's the way he was, very demanding.

Tim was more just manipulative. "I just need you to take me here. Or I need you to just go get me this or get me something." He seemed to be very comfortable just asking me to go out of my way to do things for [him] all the time. I tended to hook up with guys that felt comfortable being the one to be waited on more than let me go out of my way to do things for you. And then I

guess after Donny I really had that ingrained in my head. I'm not ever going to, that will never happen again. So I managed to stay out of those. I steered very clear of those type of relationships.

Not until these relationships were over did Vicki label Tim or Donny's behavior as emotional abuse:

It was probably.....well it was after we [she and Donny] broke up. I'd look back and say, "Why did I put up with such nonsense from him?" I mean, "Why did I keep allowing him to do that?". So I did notice it. I didn't call it emotional abuse. I just called it annoying behaviors, being treated bad. You know not being treated like you should treat someone you care about.

In fact, Vicki did not discover the term emotional abuse until after her divorce. Gradually she came to the realization that what she had experienced in her family of origin and intimate relationships was not healthy:

Yeah, so, labeling it as emotionally abusive, I would not say that I would have called it that until I got divorced and went to a therapist and discussed what things Donny had done to me and the patterns of other people in my life doing that. (stammers) I've read a lot of self-help type books and things and *Healing the Child Within* I thought was a great book and I realized then, I was like, "Well this has a name."

When Vicki examined the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors, she checked 33 items, the highest number for any participant in this study. The behaviors on the Checklist that Donny directed at her included: belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticizing, isolating her from family and friends, monitoring her time and activities,

attempting to restrict resources such as the telephone or finances, interfering with opportunities (i.e., job, medical care, education), accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him, throwing objects, not necessarily at her, discounting, verbally attacking her, having unrealistic expectations, directing dominating behaviors towards her, humiliating her in front of people, saying negative things about her sexually, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, sulking, withholding affection from her, ignoring her, slamming objects or doors, ridiculing her, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, expressing excessive jealousy, threatening her property, abusing her children, pets, or parents, labeling her in a negative way, driving recklessly to punish or scare her, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, withholding sex, and blaming her for his problems.

When asked to identify the most difficult emotionally abusive experiences, Vicki said:

There are many instances, many of them. Just being lied to, treated as if my feelings didn't matter, put down, being the target of anger and frustration, criticized a lot, and made to cry a lot, I mean, you know. Manipulated heavily, manipulated and coerced.

There were signs that Donny had problems, while they were dating. But Vicki did not see this as an insurmountable problem--or a reason not to marry him:

When we dated that whole year, I never thought of him [as] abusing me. I thought of it as having a lot of problems that he needed somebody to be understanding. And after we got married.....probably I felt that way for about maybe 6 months but then he sort of turned up the volume.

Paying attention to her feelings helped Vicki acknowledge that something was wrong:

Mainly the anger that it was causing within me. And the changes I was going through as a person. That here I was and then here I am and then, how did I get from here to here? . . . [B]y nature [I am] sort of a very trusting person, and I think people that are manipulative and whatever, they pick up on that obviously (laughs). I think just from experience with other people that I've known. I always used to think of myself as very carefree and fun-loving and independent. And then when I was in the relationship I started seeing myself becoming more isolated and fearful. Fearful of making decisions, doubting myself, feeling guilty that I'd gotten myself into this. And I can make things change but I'm just not strong enough. I'm not doing the right things to make him happy.

Initially, Vicki blamed herself and tried to reason things out:

And I tend to do that so I guess that's when I would notice, like the madder he would get or, it seemed to be more frequent. His behaviors happened more frequently. And I would think what am I doing wrong? . . . [T]hen it occurred to me, he's just this way. And because I put up with it and I don't argue back, he's getting worse. And I think there were.....a couple of instances, and one that comes to mind was really more towards the end of the relationship. My little brother was graduating from high school and he [Donny] knew that we were very close. And I had planned to go and he manipulated the situation, which I swear I had a feeling he would. And this is like the whole thought process, I know he's going to do something to where he's not going to watch the kids where I can't go.

And of course that happened. And so I missed my little brother's high school graduation because he refused to take care of the baby and his other two kids [from a previous marriage] that were living with us at the time.

Vicki's tolerance dissipated towards the end of the marriage, "I mean I would try to do the self-blaming thing for awhile. But toward the end of the relationship is usually when I would say that's it, you know, I've reached my point. And no more."

Vicki considered ending the marriage several times. One significant event occurred early in the marriage.

Right after we got married we moved to Arizona because he was going to go and "save his children" [two daughters from his first marriage] from their "horrible" mother . We moved out there and neither of us had jobs. And to me being sort of child-like in some ways, I was like oh this was fun--a new adventure. . . . We drove out there. We fought all the way out there, pretty much, every little thing. He was real manipulative, though, about that. Whenever we would argue and fight, he was the one with, "I'm so sorry," and all the while, you know, "I'll do anything, please don't get upset."

But we were on a highway out there and this is before all the, the highway shootings. And it was the strangest thing. It was real surreal. We were going along and there was this man, he cut me off and almost ran me off the road. And I just tooted the horn. I had this little tiny car. It was [not] threatening at all, you know. So he cut me off and I just like tooted the horn really just to let him know I was there. And so the guy got really mad. He was kind of [a] looney guy, I mean obviously. And he pulled along side of us. And my ex-husband had the temper

that he had. They started yelling at each other through the window. Well then the guy pulls out a gun. I just flipped out, I just freaked. I just have never had anything like that happen. I guess after that happened, I got out of the way. And we were in city traffic and it was real hard to get out of his way. And I was just like, "This can't be happening!"

I guess for a couple days after that I was very upset and my ex-husband just got so mad at me for not letting him get out and fight with this guy, which I thought was insane. And I kept saying, "And you're just insane." I mean what if? I don't know you. I just kept thinking how crazy that was. And he called me every name in the book. "And I'm going to divorce you!" And he was beside himself. I think that's one of the angriest I've ever seen him. And it really scared me. And I had thoughts of, you know, I have like 50 bucks. I'm going to go and I'm going to make my escape. I'm going to go and call my parents and tell them to send me some money and I'm going to go back home. That's it. And of course, he talked me out of it. But I was, I was, for a day or two, I was like, "I'm not, this isn't, this is crazy. I'm not doing this. And you're crazy." And then of course he [said], "I was just mad, I'm really sorry. I'll never do anything like that again."

And he never did anything quite that bad again. But, yes, there was a moment there when I was like, "I'm out of here. I don't care what commitment I made. I don't care. This is me." So I guess that one incident. And then toward the end of our relationship those kind of thoughts came to me more frequently of I'm out of here, you know.

Shortly after the birth of Vicki's son, Donny's daughters from his previous marriage came to live with them. Vicki gladly took the girls in and Donny agreed to help around the house. Vicki described their transition from no children to three:

And once they got there it, within like two or three weeks he started slacking off on responsibilities and keeping up his end of the bargain. And then it got worse and worse. And during that time is when I was becoming more and more unhappy and thinking, this isn't going to work out. But I can't go anywhere until the girls are, it's decided where they're going to go. Because it was during this whole year they were having hearings for her [Donny's ex-wife] to see about getting the girls back. And he for some reason had decided to keep them. And that was all going on while he was basically being abusive to all of us, emotionally. And of course he blamed it on his job. It's stress. He was a fireman. Things like that. But during that time I was thinking I'm miserable and I want to get out of this. I don't want my son being raised in this environment.

During this same time, Vicki had made plans to finish college. Donny was initially supportive, but he soon changed his mind:

With his support, it was his idea, of course. "You need to go back to college and finish your degree and get a good job so you can, so we can make a lot of money," was the idea. Not because I [Donny] want you to be happy. It was so you [Vicki] can make a lot of money. He felt like I was smarter than he was. But it was almost like he was going to push me to be the money-maker or something. I mean it sounds stupid now that I look back, at the time I thought "Well hey, I'd love to go back to school," you know. So I signed up for school. Took three

classes and about mid-term I had some papers due. I was doing real well. I mean I've always done real well academically, and [was] doing real well. And one morning I had to go and do a mid-term and turn in a paper. I'd stayed up all night typing. And it was before computers and all so (laughs) he was, "I don't want you to go. You'll have to just not go. I just don't feel good. I don't feel like watching the kids." And we argued for about ten minutes and I said, "Well, you'll just have to." And he said, "Oh, I'm not going to." And he basically just stood there and ripped up my paper. And threw it in the garbage. And I mean he always had temper tantrums whenever I disagreed with him. So, I just withdrew. That was the last time I went to college.

On another occasion, Donny demonstrated his power and control in the midst of an argument:

And one time I said, "You're just trying to be, you're going out of your way to be mean and intimidating. And I don't understand why you do that?"And he said, "Oh you want to see mean and intimidating?" And he picked me up, "Eerrrr, I'm Mister He-Man" and kind of held me up against the wall for about a second or two. And I just, you know, [said] "Put me down!" And I think I kicked at him but it wasn't meant to hurt him. I just, I don't know, I was just mad. I was furious. And so he let me go. So, it wasn't like he was trying to hurt me but it was a show of "I'm in control." And then he dumped all of our clothes on the (laughs) floor in a big pile and I let them sit there for about three weeks. And he would, you know, fuss about it everyday.

Of Donny's emotionally abusive behavior, Vicki said that verbal attacks were the most harmful, whereas his sulking had the least impact. Today, Vicki has a broad view of emotional abuse and does not tolerate this kind of behavior from anyone. She said, ". . . [A]fter (my ex), . . . I'm not ever going to, that will never happen again."

Because Vicki felt responsible for the welfare of Donny's daughters who came to live with them, she did not to leave the marriage until arrangements were made for them. Donny knew that she was unhappy and threatened to take her son if she left. Since he had taken his daughters from their mother, Vicki took this threat seriously:

. . . [T]his scared me of course, being a new mother. He would threaten me, "Well you can't. If you leave I'll take (our son) And so I was like, well, I kind of did believe him, I kind of thought, well he got their kids away from their mom. . . . But he was kind of manipulative with the DFACs [the Family and Children Services Agency in Arizona] people about that. About any, how we ended up.....with not just them [the girls] coming to live with us, [with] temporarily awarded custody to him.

The image that Donny projected to the state agency in Arizona was that of a "model citizen":

Oh he was picture-perfect. The fireman. Nice home. Nice wife. New baby. You know. Real charming and pleasant. The girls would always be dressed really nice. I took good care of them. [There] wasn't any problem with us taking care of them. But yeah, he was real convincing. Cause they were going to let them go back to their mom, the ones [Family and Children Services Agency] in Arizona. He had painted this horrible picture of her. I really didn't know her, just what he had said.

Come to find out, most of it wasn't true. And she did have a little problem [with drugs]. She had a problem but she recovered and did everything she was supposed to do. She passed all of her drug tests within that year. And deserved to get them back.

Vicki was pregnant with their daughter when Donny abruptly sent the girls back to their mother and announced that he wanted out of their marriage:

. . . [H]e even orchestrated that whole thing as, "I want you to leave. I'm sending the girls back to Arizona and I want you to leave. And take [our son]. I don't want anything to do with you anymore." . . . I thought he had lost his mind. It's like, "What is? What?" But I did feel relieved when I got home. I was scared, confused, scared. What's going on? And then of course, he was already involved with someone else so he wasn't focused on our son. I think that made me feel like a sigh of relief that he wasn't going to try to take our son away from me.

After the divorce, Donny made no effort to see the children unless Vicki asked about child support. Then he threatened to take them:

He never wanted to see the children, he always had excuses. . . . "My wife doesn't want them to be around. I have to work all the time. I can't drive all the way to your town." But then when I would fuss with him about money he would say, "I'm going to come pick the kids up this weekend." And I would say, "But they don't even know you, you've never been around." I mean we split up when my son was a year old and I was pregnant with my daughter. I said "I don't feel comfortable, I mean these babies go off in a car with you to somewhere." He

wouldn't even let me know his address or phone number because he said his wife didn't want me to. . .

But yeah he would threaten me a lot, though. Every time we'd get mad, that's when he would do the, "Well I'm just gonna come and pick the kids up and there's nothing you can do and I'll bring the sheriff and," and all that. And I'd say, "Never mind, just forget it." And then he would pay me what he wanted.

Donny also reminded Vicki that he had taken his daughters from his first wife and would take children as well:

He's done that a couple of times. And over the years, especially when they [Vicki's kids] were really young, whenever we would argue about him owing money he would bring that up. "I'm just going to pick the kids up. And you're a single mom and you work evenings. And I have a wife and a nice house. And a nice family and this that and the other. The courts will give me the children." And then I'd back off from my, you know, I'm going to have to call a lawyer, if you don't start paying me blah, blah, blah. So he would always threaten me with that. And then I finally called his bluff, in '94, I guess, yeah about in '94. I said, "Go ahead." We did end up going to court but I wasn't afraid of him doing that anymore. That was kind of a big deal for me. Up until then, every time he would start that I would get scared and back off. "Ok, ok, ok, just whatever."

Five years after the divorce, Vicki finished nursing school, moved out of her parents' house to another town, and took Donny to court for child support:

I felt a little more like I was able to stand on my own two feet and not be so defeated. I think overall I felt more empowered. So that's the conscious decision

to go ahead and move forward with a contempt thing, regardless of what he was threatening to do. But I was very, I was scared but I felt ok with it then. Whereas [the] year before that I wouldn't have.

She won child support, although Donny did not pay her for a long time.

Tusting men after the divorce was a real challenge:

Let's see.....I guess about three years before I actually dated anybody. And he was a nice guy but I just could not connect with anybody. I mean we could go out, we could, you know enjoy the same things, go to movies, go to see shows or whatever. But I just couldn't. I would clam up as soon as any intimacy started.....at all. It was scaring me that I was able to have sex with somebody and not feel, that scared me the first time. Cause I was like man this is wrong. This is not me. I was thinking, am I ever going to be able to love anybody or trust anybody? Then so I just detached. I just didn't allow myself to get to close to anybody, to get to that point. And I would say, average I would date somebody for a couple of months, maybe three (laughs) and then if it got to the point of intimacy I would find some reason to get out of it. So I did that for.....I guess it was a couple of years.

Then Vicki met John:

. . . [W]e just connected. I mean just right off the bat. And had so much in common and all. And I think that's the first person that I actually allowed myself to open up to. But, John broke my heart (laughs) after about three or four months. So his ex-wife kind of came back into the picture and that brought up some feelings. But that was the big, the one I actually cried about when we split. . . .

[T]he other people that I would go out with and things would start kind of moving in a more, let's just date each other. And then I would get cold feet and it just didn't bother me. If they said, "You know, I feel like this just isn't going anywhere," or I felt like that it didn't bother me in the least. I mean I could just go from one day to seeing them a lot to the next day not seeing them anymore. And it was kind of like, "Oh, well."

The marriage to Donny has made Vicki less tolerant with people:

Yeah, um.....ok, um, uh my last relationship which was about this time last year, when I was involved in it. You know after we got to know each other and started being more comfortable and I let Teddy in my circle of family, my two children and myself. That's my family. [I] sort of let Teddy cross over into that bound, that little line there, which I'm somewhat cautious of doing because of my children, obviously. I don't know, he would just make little comments like I would say, "Oh, I have so much to do today! I've got to do something out in the yard or, I've got, you know, laundry to do and all." And Teddy would start, "You know, your kids need to be doing that, not you." Well ok, maybe he's right but it just rubbed me the wrong way. And it got to be more frequent that Teddy would question a lot of my decisions about the way I deal with my kids. (laughs) And to me it's like this is so stupid, but it really bothered me that little habits, like Teddy's very perfectionistic and organized and I'm just not.

I'm very laid back and I have animals and cats. And they get up on the counter and I just wipe it off. And it doesn't bother me but it really bothered him. And that's when I started to realize this is not going to work as a permanent type

of relationship. Because I'm not willing to change. I'm forty years old. I rationalize all this out and I'm thinking, I'm going to be doing this when I'm forty years old with everybody that comes along (laughs). "Well, they don't like it this way? Well too bad for them!" You know? (laughs)

Vicki's experiences of emotional abuse made it difficult for her to accept the behavior of doctors with whom she worked in the hospital:

The temper, you know, flying off the handles, yelling, I mean they were horrible, some of them. Some were really nice but most of them were very demanding, very mean in their tone. And I've even seen them throw things at people Oh my God I was scared to death. And I'm sure that's what it was. It was the fear of failure. The fear of being yelled at. Like I said, ever since, well I think compounded with, my dad didn't really scream and yell a lot but he was very sarcastic in his criticism. Donny was just flat out mean. Other boyfriends I've had, you know it was just more of atemper tantrum without the physical. I was never afraid of anybody. That's the thing. It wasn't like I thought they were going to hit me. It's just that yelling or calling names or just being so angry they couldn't control it. That justwigs me out. And it still does. I just have a real hard time dealing with people who lose their temper. And start talking louder or invading my personal space or cornering me I guess. You know, "Why did you do this? Why did you,"

And that happened a lot at the hospital. . . . [A]nd I think that my underlying anxiety had to do with having that situation come up where I was going to be the target of someone's yelling at me. And of course people I talked to

[said], “Well just don’t let it bother you.” It’s like well (sighs) you know (raises voice) you might be able to do it, but I would get so mad at that inside I would just start shaking and turn red. And sometimes I would even, not a lot, there were maybe three times that I let it get to me bad enough where I had to like go in the bathroom and just sob. And I thought this is just crazy. I can’t function like this. I mean I[‘ve] got to do something. So I went to a therapist. And I was like, I can’t handle people criticizing, well a little criticism is one thing but the, you know, (clicks fingers) “What are you doing this for?! Why did you do this way? Did you know what you did was wrong?” And you know, just really the humiliation and embarrassment, surprise attack kind of thing (laughs). Things going wrong.

And I was so nervous about things going wrong and me getting yelled at that I let it interfere a lot. I would come home at night and be so wound up that I would just couldn’t sleep. And so I went to a doctor and he put me on an anti-depressant. Then I went to a therapist for awhile. We talked about where this was coming from but I just never.....I don’t think I resolved it completely. I mean it’s still there. Not quite as intense. But for some reason I thought that I had to stay at the hospital.....regard[less], that was it. That’s the end. I’ve come to the end of my line. This is what I have to do and I can’t change jobs.

Perception of Self

The abuse affected Vicki’s psychological well-being. She has been depressed and anxious divorce:

. . . [The relationship] caused me to doubt myself a lot. And caused me to become depressed. I mean, I actually since I’ve been divorced, I actually [have] been on

anti-depressants for anxiety. I started having anxiety attacks. One of my doctors said major depression and although it's never been to the point of, you know, I want to kill myself it's been I just don't want to get up today. I have had a lot of struggles with that. And, in addition to that, [I have] hyperthyroidism which also kind of makes you real draggy. (stammers) I'm still afraid to come off my anti-depressants because I'm afraid of having to hold it all together at work. And the anxiety, I don't want that to come back. (stammers) I was even almost agoraphobic at times. I just didn't want to be anywhere where people were. And that was right after I got divorced. But then I kinda pulled myself out of that, and it got to where it was just the anxiety attacks. And then I went to see a doctor and that's when [he] said, "Oh, you're hyperthyroid too. No wonder you're so tired all the time." (stammers) But it's been a very, it's been very much of a struggle.

So.....but yeah, I would say during the relationship it was a lot of anger and fear, negativity. Now it's anger but more of the, it's more directed not so much at myself or him specifically, but at the whole situation. You know, that I've become this, that I've become more, I've become depressed. And I can't seem to handle anger as well. I don't have outbursts or temper but I internalize a lot. And so, you know, I guess I'm resentful about that.

Vicki felt guilty about having been in the relationship:

I got to where I doubted all of my decisions. I felt like I lost the ability to use my judgment, that I just didn't trust my own instincts anymore about what I thought was right and wrong and [it] probably caused me to have a lot of guilt especially after I had my kids. You know, that I should have made better decisions or I

wouldn't have gotten hooked up with this person and this wouldn't have happened. It's all my fault. I should have seen what was coming. I should have known that this person was going to treat me bad. And in any of the situations that I've been in I should have been smarter. And [I have] a lot of guilt and blame.

Her perception of herself and her decision-making skills have improved but she struggles with self-confidence. Friends have been helpful:

. . . [W]hen I talk to people who reassure me that (stammers) everybody makes bad decisions. But at least you realize it and you're successful in raising your kids. You know they boost me. They're supportive and tell me that changes, but (sighs) it kind of has an up and down effect. I mean there'll be times when things aren't working out that I start (sighs) re-reviewing all of the mistakes that I've made and if I just hadn't have done this. If I'd (stammers) gotten away from Donny, my life would be better. I don't think I would have ended up in this situation with two ki[ds]. I mean you know, I just review it over and over. But not obsessively but just when things aren't going well. And I'm sort of like in one of my lower depression type of things. I kind of tend to remind myself, you know, mentally I guess, look where you are. It's nobody's fault but your own.

But then again, like I said, if I get in a funk like that I'll end up calling one of my friends. And we talk and they go, "But just think of all the good things. And just think, you wouldn't have your kids. And look how far you've come," (stammers) I can be feeling real bummed out. But then I have, at times, I have to push myself to remind myself that things could be worse. And then I'm grateful for, you know the good things that have happened.

Since turning 40, Vicki has spent a lot of time reviewing her life:

I feel like I'm still striving to be at peace with myself about decisions I've made.

A little bit of regret about not being a stronger person so I feel like I missed out on a lot of things that I would probably want to do. (stammers) It has to do with

having children and being a mom, and being, especially adding the single part.

But I think turning forty really hit me. (laughs) I mean that has a lot to do with it

as well as a lot of experiences I've had that I let a lot of things slide. I let a lot of

opportunities slip by. I should have stayed in school way back when. Yeah, I'm

starting to look more beyond, before Donny even to some things that I think, God,

why did I waste time doing this or why didn't I just have more courage to just

take off and be more independent. You know when I think about [it], well you

know I guess I did let boyfriends kind of push me around a little bit and so I guess

[I'm] resentful about missing opportunities that I think I might have had. And

letting people make me think that I wasn't smart enough or capable of doing more

with my life. (stammers) I just think I wasted a lot of time on being self-doubting

and low self-esteem. I think that's kind of something that's in my head right now.

And I guess I dwell on it some.

During the marriage, Vicki did not tell her best friend, Betsy or her parents, how troubled she was:

My best friend has had a lot of her own marriage problems and stuff. . . . I didn't

really talk to her a whole lot about what I was going through until afterwards. I

didn't talk to anybody really about what I was going through because I felt almost

like maybe I was wrong and it was kind of embarrassing. And I knew that they

were going to say, well if you're not happy you need to get out. And I already knew that. I mean I already knew that you know, I was unhappy but, what is my responsibility here, you know.

I just didn't talk to them [parents or Betsy] about what we fought about because it was very personal. A lot of it had to do with sex, him just having temper tantrums about dumb things. And I thought well, this is stupid. I should be able to deal with this myself. I didn't feel like I had the right to unload on people because they wouldn't understand. (stammers) It was hard for me to express my feelings to anybody about it because I just, I was so confused about the way I felt. I think that's what it was. Cause Betsy said, "If I had known what all you went through when you were going through [it] I would have come over there and gotten you out of that. I would have said screw him and I would have just come and gotten you." And I think I was afraid that somebody might do that and then I'd be a total failure. Isn't that weird?

Vicki's mother recognized how unhappy she was with Donny but did not acknowledge it until after the divorce. The idea of divorce was difficult for her family to accept:

. . . [W]henver I would start complaining a little bit about the situation, "I just don't know mom, it just makes me mad when he pulls these little stunts or he won't help me with the kids and he won't." . . . [S]he would say, "But you married him and you made a commitment. You need to work these things out." (stammers) I felt like at the time she was almost taking his side. . . . If you got married that was your lot in life. And you're the woman. You have to hold it

together. . . . She can't stand Donny and she thinks he's a loser but he was a man first. And so, you know, he was the husband. And when it comes down to it, you[ve] got to do what the man says. And until I got out of that situation and even when I started telling her some of the things that he did, I could see that it made her angry but she never expressed, "Well I wish you had told us where we could have helped you." My friends did. But my mom and dad didn't. They didn't want to hear, you know, "That's fine but it's over now. You've moved on. You've made a mistake."

Neither her parents nor younger brother were emotionally supportive:

. . . [T]hat they [her parents] just acted like they didn't want to hear it. They didn't understand it. And I think they didn't know how to deal with. I don't know if they (stammers) didn't believe me. I don't think it was so much they didn't believe me but they just didn't know how to respond. They were not handling emotional discussions real well. More of a, "You need to do this and you need to do that."

Her older brother was the most supportive and Vicki valued his efforts:

He's been much more supportive of me and my kids. But you know being concerned and calling every once in a while to see how we're doing. After his divorce, I moved near him where we did spend a lot of weekends with our kids together. We did have some emotional heart-to-heart talks. I think because I've always looked up to him because he's such a good-hearted [and] smart, has it all together person that I felt, I don't know what the word is. It meant a lot to me that he cared, that he showed concern and listened to what I had to say and asked me for advice too. I just felt very fortunate that he opened up to me.

This brother also saw the independent part of Vicki's personality and admired it: We had a real long talk one time and he said, "I always saw you as very independent and not dependent on people." I just totally saw myself as opposite. So I asked him, "Well tell me why you think that. I'm curious as to why you [would]. [And he replied] "It's because you kind of do what you want. I mean if things don't look the way you want it," he said, "especially since before you were married to Donny and after." He said, "Now when you were married to Donny, it was all different. I think he really had you.....pinned down and that was a mess," he said. "But before then I mean you'd meet people and move there and move here and change. You know if you didn't like what you were doing you just moved somewhere else." And I said yeah, I sort of call that flighty, you know (laughs). I call that very indecisive and not knowing what the hell I'm doing. Vicki's friends were an emotional anchor, especially Reba, a childhood friend,

who re-entered Vicki's life at the time of the divorce:

I had some friends who were very supportive. And one friend in particular, Reba, was a childhood friend. She's very fiesty and always hated him [Donny] and [said], "He'll have to come through me to get those kids." I mean, you know, she convinced me, I guess.

Right afterwards I was just (stammers) a mess. I mean that's all I can [say] an emotional mess. I was (clears throat) confused, angry, hurt, very self-doubting. I didn't want to interact with people. I was very depressed. And then just by coincidence I happened to run into one of my old friends [Reba]. And we had been estranged during my marriage because Reba did not like my ex-husband.

Donny had alienated me from everybody except my family. And so, (clears throat) I credit Reba for helping me come out of that part of the depression that I was in where I was embarrassed, humiliated, hated life. I'd just turned thirty. I had two ki[ds], you know, a baby and a toddler. Just everything sucked you know? But we started getting out and going places and taking the kids places. And she helped me with my kids and so at that point in my life there was hope. Like well things aren't as bad as I thought they were. And maybe I can get back to normal. And I would say that I credit Reba for that. And she's a kick you in the butt and come on let's go, don't mope around. But also she would, Reba listened to me some, a lot you know.

Another support turned out to be her ex-husband's third ex-wife, Vivian. This woman validated Vicki's experience of abuse. Vicki felt that this woman could understand her experience as no one else could.

Vicki's emotionally abusive marriage has shown her that Vicki she is stronger than she thought she was. She has come to recognize that she has several strengths; including her sense of humor and her laid back attitude that helps her look calm, even when she is not.

Eliza

Eliza was a 37 year-old married woman with an easy-going manner, a quick laugh and ready wit. Her Midwestern origins were evident in her accent. Curly salt and pepper hair crowned her head. Eliza had a medium frame and was dressed in a loose shirt which hung down to her hips over her pants. A recovering alcoholic, she has been sober for a decade and a half. Eliza attends AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings occasionally. She

regularly attends ACOA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) meetings which she believed to be better suited to her needs.

The interview took place in Beth's comfortable well-lit living room with her cats hovering. She sat on a comfortable couch with a coffee table in front of her. As she talked, Eliza shifted occasionally placing her bare feet on the table, sometimes curling her legs to the side.

In the midst of working on her own qualitative dissertation, Eliza related to the challenge of finding participants. Her experience in an emotionally abusive marriage prompted her to call about the study. She wanted people to be aware of emotional abuse.

Eliza's first marriage ended several years ago. She is now remarried. Eliza and Parker, her second husband, moved to the area recently and were in the process of getting settled.

Family of Origin

Eliza grew up the oldest girl of four children. Her parents divorced when she was an early adolescent. She and her siblings lived with her father after the divorce.

Independence or self-confidence was not taught in her family of origin. She learned instead:

. . . [T]o either not make any waves, not be any trouble at all or to take care of the people around me, mostly to take care of my parents. *So, that prepared me very well* (says with emphasis) (laughs) for going into relationships where I would just continue to suppress whatever was going on with me emotionally, and not take care of myself and take care of my partner instead.

When asked to define an emotionally abusive relationship Eliza said that it was a relationship in which a person, “felt controlled by someone else emotionally . . . and out of control themselves, to a certain extent.” She also said that her experience of emotional abuse was a difficult thing stay in touch with,

I think that in my experiences both with my parents and with my partner [first husband], it’s been difficult to affirm my experience of being abused because I’ve never been hit. You know, there’s never been anything as overt as that.

She was taught to behave as if everything was fine--that this was just life. This attitude allowed her to ignore “how ugly it feels inside.”

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Eliza’s father directed at Eliza included: criticizing, negating her feelings or ideas, having unrealistic expectations, directing dominating behaviors towards her, humiliating her in front of people, threatening to abandon her physically or emotionally, threatening her property, labeling her in a negative way, and interrupting her sleeping or eating habits.

Behaviors Eliza’s mother directed at her included: accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully engaging in hurtful behaviors directed at her mother, negating her feelings or ideas, having unrealistic expectations, sulking, withholding affection, threatening to physically or emotionally abandon her, and blaming her for her mother’s problems.

Significant Relationships

Eliza estimated that she had dated between 15 to 20 men. The level of commitment in these relationships ranged from casual to serious. Most of Eliza’s serious relationships became intense rather quickly.

Eliza identified three relationships as being emotionally abusive in some way. The first of these occurred when she was in high school, the second in college, and the third in her early twenties. Eliza dated Taylor, her first emotionally abusive partner for four months. She and Jack, her second emotionally abusive partner, went out for nine months. Eliza and Colin, her first husband and third emotionally abusive partner, were together for nine and a half years.

A feeling of guilt led Eliza to stay in the relationship with Taylor, her high school beau, longer than she had intended. He was a year older and had just graduated from high school. Leaving him was difficult because he purchased many items of clothing for her:

(clears throat) I didn't break up with him before Christmas because I knew that he had gotten me all of these things and I felt really guilty about the fact that he had gotten me all of these things and so I let him give them to me and then I broke up with him. Good logic (laughs).

Jack was a good-looking, nice guy whom Eliza saw as a "real catch." He belonged to a group of friends with whom she hung out. After a month of dating, Eliza wanted to break up with him. But she was reluctant because, ". . . [I]t would have been so embarrassing to break up with somebody that quickly, you know, after I so wanted to go out with him." She worried about how their friends would view her if she broke up with him. She was also concerned that Jack might talk about her, so she stayed in the relationship for nine months.

When she finally broke off with Jack, she suggested that they get counseling. He refused to go and Eliza felt vulnerable:

I broke up with him and then a couple weeks later was just really miserable. And I was really clear that I was going to do something abusive to myself and that I basically had three choices at that point. *I was either going to drink, and at that point, I had a year of sobriety, something like that. So I was either going to drink or I was going to commit suicide or I was going to get back together with Jack.* (says with emphasis) (laughs) And I thought, “Oh, well, (laughs) clearly one of these is the best option.” (laughs) So, I went back to Jack and said, “You know what? I really want to date you.” And it felt really safe at that point, too, because he was getting ready to go out of the country for several months. But yeah, in that relationship I was much more aware. I was much more conscious of the things that were going on that were weird. Then I’ve been able to stay conscious of things when I’m more invested, more committed.

The relationship with Jack ended for good and Eliza began dating Colin shortly thereafter. The relationship with Colin was the first that did not overlap with a previous relationship. In the past, Eliza tended to overlap her relationships. This was because she, “was very into security.”

She met Colin at an AA meeting and immediately felt connected to him: “I really believed that Colin was my soulmate (laughs).” Although he was charming, Eliza sensed that he had a temper which he “suppressed” when they were together.

They met shortly before Eliza left to go to Europe for a long planned-for trip and work experience. After a month and a half, she cut the trip short telling her European colleagues: “You know, if I go home, I will probably marry this man.” Although they did not marry for a couple years, Eliza assumed that this would happen:

I guess, well I was 26 when we got married. . . . I guess I was 25, when we officially decided to get married. But pretty much from the time, you know, after going out with him for several months, I would have.....said, we're going to get married.

Because of her parents' divorce, Eliza felt that marriage was a commitment to stay together: "And I was determined that I was not going to [go] through what they had gone through and getting divorced. And so, it took a lot of commitment with me to actually make that amount of commitment."

Colin was 14 years older than Eliza and she remarked that their relationship was similar in some ways to her relationship with her dad. Both Colin and Eliza's dad engaged in behaviors that were emotionally abusive of her. They both criticized her, had unrealistic expectations, negated her feelings, tried to dominate her, and humiliated her in front of people. Eliza felt that childhood "primed" her for the relationship with Colin.

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Colin directed at Eliza included: belittling, criticizing her, isolating her from family and friends, monitoring her time and activities, attempting to restrict resources such as the telephone or finances, throwing objects, not necessarily at her, discounting her, negating her feelings or ideas, having unrealistic expectations, directing dominating behaviors towards her, saying negative things about her sexually, sulking, withholding affection from her, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, expressing excessive jealousy, labeling her in a negative way, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, and blaming her for his problems.

In hindsight, Eliza reasoned that her perceptions of the relationship were related to where she was developmentally: “I felt at first, pretty comfortable. Welllll, being who I was. I had no idea who I was.” Colin was established in his career and Eliza wanted someone to take care of her and make decisions. Colin, on the other hand, was looking for “. . . somebody to take care of him and adore him and make him feel like (sighs) like, like a big man who can do everything right.”

The relationship worked until Eliza changed, “I grew up. And he was like, “What?! What happened?! What’s wrong?!” This, Eliza explained, violated their unspoken agreement: “The deal was he would take care of me. I would love him unreservedly. And after awhile I couldn’t do it anymore.”

Eliza tried to save the marriage. They went to a couple of different marital therapists after they were separated, but Eliza chose to get a divorce. Colin now lives in another section of the country. They have each others’ telephone numbers but are rarely in contact. Eliza prefers it that way.

Eliza met her current husband, Parker, while she was in graduate school. They dated for two and a half years and have been married for a year and a half.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

Eliza reflected on the dynamics of her relationships with Taylor, Jack, and Colin and acknowledged that she was emotionally abused by each of them. Of Taylor, Eliza said that he, “. . . wanted to remake me.” He had her hair cut by a friend of his and bought her several hundred dollars worth of clothing and shoes. The hair cut and clothing were “. . . [t]hings that [she] would not have gotten, but that he wanted to see [her] in.” When

Eliza decided to break up with Taylor, he threw away the class ring she had returned to him, hoping, she believed, to make her feel guilty.

Eliza recalled Jack as a controlling man who loved the outdoors. He often made plans for joint adventures without her input. He was focused exclusively on his personal accomplishments and not on Eliza's experience. Eliza recounted a hiking trip in a national park during several days of rainy weather. Exhausted, she wanted to cut the trip short. Jack refused, until he was tired of the rain. They left the park and Eliza suggested that they stop at a hotel. She even offered to pay for the room, but when the rain stopped Jack wanted to pitch a tent. Eventually, they drove several hours through the night back to the city where they lived.

Jack also had inconsistent appearance standards. When Eliza met his family, he wanted her to dress up. When he met her family he wore his "comfortable ratty shorts."

Eliza knew that there were problems in the relationship and suggested couples counseling. Jack said that since she was already in counseling, she was the one with problems, that he did not need therapy. Soon afterwards, Eliza broke up with him. Because she was at a low point in her life, she resumed the relationship. Months later the relationship with Jack ended.

Eliza's relationship with Colin began five months after the final break-up with Jack. Initially, it seemed ideal. Looking back, she realized that there were clues of problems three months into the relationship. Colin, like Jack and Taylor, tried to control Eliza's appearance. At the beginning he seemed totally accepting of her. But he soon wanted changes:

. . . [A]fter we got together he started asking me to wear different clothes pretty quickly. I was wearing tank tops with no bras [that were] sometimes fairly see through (laughs) when he and I first got together. And it's what I wore. But he got pretty upset about me wearing it when anybody else could see me.

Another early "sign" was Eliza's decision to quit her teaching job in Europe on short notice to come back to be with Colin. Their telephone bill was a thousand dollars and she rationalized that it was too costly to stay in Europe. That they could not limit their telephone calls should have been a clue, Eliza said, on reflection.

When the relationship with Colin started, Eliza thought it was less dysfunctional than her previous relationships. Her perspective now is that he was "just more smooth." For example, he first accepted her decision not to shave her legs or underarms. Six months later he said that she would be more attractive to him if she shaved. So she did. When she thought about this issue and brought it up a year later, he continued to cite the attractiveness issue. Eliza did not understand his change in attitude but continued to shave:

That was one of the things that I was clearly doing specifically for him. And so I guess I felt like after awhile I was doing stuff to try to be the partner, the wife that he wanted or that I thought he wanted.....and I got.....more resentful as time went on. I think part of the progression was that once we got past one issue there'd be another one. You know something about the way I dressed. Or something about how long I kept my hair. And what it felt like to me was like he was never satisfied with who I was. And that I had to keep trying to hue closer to something. And it wasn't enough. That I was growing my hair and that I wasn't

wearing the things that I used to wear. There was always something more that he wanted. And I think that I felt like that in a lot of different areas.

The emotional abuse was continuous and intensified over time. For example, they had discussed who would deal with money matters on a daily basis (e.g., paying bills) and it was acceptable to Eliza that Colin assume that role. But whenever she asked about their finances, he accused her of not trusting him. Tension around this issue heightened after they moved West and Eliza enrolled in a graduate program.

Colin moved but he was not thrilled about it. It required him to leave his consulting business and network of contacts. He tried to pursue his long time dream of becoming a writer. However, that career did not blossom and he could not revive his consulting business. Subsequently, Colin was unemployed for over three years.

Eliza, the couple's sole support, was also a full-time student, working on an assistantship and taking out student loans. In discussions about their financial situation, Colin asserted that he was contributing twice as much money--so he had a right to have more say. Ironically, the money he contributed was borrowed on his credit cards.

After Colin's plans to write or rebuild his consulting firm did not pan out, he became depressed. Eliza asked him to be more flexible about the kind of job he would take, but Colin was unwilling to do this. He suggested that Eliza quit school and find a full-time job.

The ebb and flow of Colin's consulting business work had always been difficult. For months, there would be lots of work--and then there were months of no work and financial strain. Out West during the long period he was not working, Eliza grew anxious

about finances. This period coincided with her emerging awareness of the emotionally abusive dynamics in the relationship. She explained:

Well I was in therapy. You know, talking to my therapist at least once a week. I also had.....contacts with several pretty supportive friends. I was talking to one friend and I was describing to her something about, (laughs) it was probably the fact that I was scared to bring home the wrong kind of fish sticks. (laughs) “But it’s just cause, you know, he really, really likes that one kind of fish stick.” And she said, “Wow, you sound like a woman who’s abused who’s trying to make excuses for her abuser.” And it just clicked, you know. And I’m sure people had said things before that, but I was ready at that point to hear it.

Eliza reached a point where she felt she had done all she could to make the marriage work. They separated and she moved out. Though separated, they tried marital counseling twice. This proved unsuccessful and Eliza decided to divorce shortly thereafter.

Near the break-up, Colin closely monitored Eliza’s time and she was always anxious about being late. She even found it difficult to go to her 12-step program meetings:

I remember feeling like he was resistant to me going to these meetings. And that was at a time when he was being very controlling of my time. You know where he always wanted to know where I was and what time I was going to be home. Even though they met in AA and both attended meetings regularly at the beginning of the relationship, Colin stopped going.

Eliza felt pressured to look and act the way Colin wanted. She struggled to speak up for herself. Learning to ride a motorcycle and going to graduate school were attempts to give herself voice. She believed that Colin came across the country when she entered graduate school, not to be supportive, but because he realized that she would leave him.

Colin had never been physically violent but when Eliza said she was moving, he threw something. She began to wonder if he would harm her and she was disturbed when he bought a gun:

And I think that he told me that something else happened [in the neighborhood] that scared him, right before he bought the gun. So I didn't feel like it was focused at me. But knowing that he had a gun made me more afraid of an attack by him. Cause I think I had an easier time picturing him shooting me than physically beating me up.

Perception of Self

Reading self-help books and therapy helped Eliza develop clarity about what the term emotional abuse means to her. She also acknowledged that she was emotionally abusive to her ex-husband and holds herself accountable for her actions while at the same time putting them in context:

And I guess, you know, where I'm at is, I have no hesitation identifying what I went through in that relationship with my ex-husband as emotional abuse. I also can pretty clearly say I engaged in some things that were emotionally abusive as a defense. But, I think it's important for me to remember that it was as a defense. That it's not like I also walked into that relationship you know. I can be manipulative. I don't think that's part of the way that I generally relate with

people is to be emotionally abusive. And I think that that's part of the way my ex relates with people.

Of Eliza's self-perception during the relationship she said,

I felt really horrible about myself in general. I didn't like myself. I didn't feel good about anything that I was doing in school and anything that I was doing at all. You know nothing made me feel better about myself.....maybe for a couple minutes.....I got all A's again! But in general, it felt like I was fighting uphill all the time. There was nothing I could do that seemed to satisfy my ex-husband and he was the person who I most wanted to please.

After the separation, Eliza vacillated between feeling like a strong survivor to feeling like a "dupe" or victim. She came to recognize that Colin was abusive and that this behavior began early in the relationship. She questioned how she allowed this to happen. With time she came to believe that her family experiences made it easier for her to accept emotional abuse. Her relationship with her parents and her experience of their divorce left her with the belief one should not give up on a commitment:

So I can look back now and I can see that I gave it everything I had. And I haven't doubted my decision which is a real blessing (sighs and laughs). You know, I haven't spent time second guessing whether or not I should have stayed in that relationship. And I believe that's because I stayed in it until it was really, really obvious that it was not something that I could do.

Eliza sees herself generally in a favorable light. She still struggles with depression, moments of self-doubt, and being scared. She gave her first marriage her best

shot and she has moved on. Eliza has made peace with what happened and how she handled it. She also holds no resentments.

Eliza feels affirmed by her current husband, Parker:

I know that he loves me as me. It doesn't matter you know, he liked me with my hair long, he likes me with my hair short. He is fine with whether I shave or not. He likes me if I gain weight (laughs) he likes me if I lose.

Parker never monitors Eliza's time or has a problem with her participation in AA or CODA or ACOA meetings. He encourages her to make her own decisions, and to do what will be good and helpful for her.

Eliza perceives herself as a hopeful person and as someone who looks for the best in situations. She is willing to reach out to others for support. Because she is a good friend and loves people, this keeps people around her as well.

It is important to Eliza to be a trusting person. She has to temper this with exploration and knowledge of what she wants, what is important to her, and how she wants to be treated. She has taken stock of her relationship with her first husband and has a more balanced view of the situation:

When I was totally blaming him for destroying my life.....it was really hard for me to think about entering another relationship long-term. When I went back and re-framed some of it and said, ok. I may have felt trapped but I was making decisions and I was you know, I was there as an adult. And I was responsible for staying in that relationship. You know I wasn't responsible for the fact that he was abusive. But I was responsible for the fact that I stayed as long as I did. When I took responsibility for that, all of the sudden it was a lot easier to look at.

Talking with people and getting support helped Eliza take action and move beyond the abuse.

Becka

Becka was a 31-year-old woman with a soft voice whose accent reflected her Midwestern background. Tall and lanky, there were times when she used her voice and body movements to emphasize what she was saying. The movement of her body seemed tied to her progression through her answers, as she thought through her responses to the questions. Becka was articulate and had done a lot of reflecting about her relationship. She was a graduate student in the social sciences.

Becka moved around a great deal on the couch during her interviews. At times she sat up. Other times Becka relaxed into the sofa's corner. She occasionally stretched out along the couch's full length.

Becka's expressed purpose for participating in this study was to increase awareness about emotional abuse. She planned to donate the money she received for participating to Sister Spirit Camp, a feminist organization that gave her emotional space and support while she was in an emotionally abusive marriage. That organization and good friends helped her gain the strength to leave the relationship.

Her first marriage, to Gregg, was emotionally abusive. Their relationship lasted almost four years. Becka is currently married to Matt. She and Matt had been friends and had dated prior to her relationship and marriage to Gregg. They remained friends during Becka's marriage to Gregg. She and Matt began dating again after her divorce and later married.

Family of Origin

Becka grew up a two-parent family where she was the youngest of two children. Her emotionally abusive marriage has given her insight into the relationship with Stuart, her older brother:

Retrospectively, in wondering about my relationship with Gregg [her ex-husband], I realized that I had a fairly emotionally abusive relationship with my brother in terms of how he treated me. I was always seeking to be a good sister and I was wanting his approval. And he was eighteen months older . . . his language was always very denigrating.

Although Becka did not identify her relationship with Stuart as emotionally abusive until later in life, she sees similarities between his behavior and her ex-husband. For example, she said:

It's just words, "sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me." And, to see it as systematic or just to start questioning yourself about [it], you know I'm not lovable and I am selfish. I'm not giving. Therefore, I need to try harder because it's like the person that I'm with and that I care about tells me these things. And, if that's how he perceives me then that's obviously how I have to be. Because having no recompense to say that someone might lie about how they perceive you. I just had no basis for that. Which is where I say with my brother it was that same sort of thing because my brother used to call me names, tell me I was ugly and tell me all those sorts of things. And somehow I never. took those as him just trying to be mean. I took those as how he really

perceived me. And so then you try harder and harder to get approval because you think they really do see you as uncaring.

Becka's parents were probably unaware of the impact of Start's behavior. They framed it differently:

. . . [They were] great parents but I think they didn't see it as a bad thing. Because it wasn't like he was really hitting on me or anything. It was just that they saw it as general sibling rivalry. And I don't think they really understood base line characters because, I wasn't competitive like he was competitive against me. So, I interpreted his behaviors differently.

In retrospect, Becka sees Stuart's behavior as more than sibling rivalry. She described the depth of his negative attitude and her neutral response to him:

. . . [W]hen we were little I always sought my brother's approval. I was not a competitive sibling. I wanted to be friends. And I.....always, there was always this sort of tension and in his mind there was a competition

. . . [H]e did computers. And it was his computer and I wasn't allowed to use it. And I was never allowed to use it unless I asked. And then you know, he would never teach me how to do it. He would just load his stuff. And I had a horse and I loved my horse and I was the horse person. And my brother never rode but he would, this is one thing I remember being really weird is that he said, "Well, if I rode horses I'd be better than you."

. . . [H]e was a good student and I was a good student and he was two class years ahead of me. And the school I went to was fairly large, it was 2000 students for a high school but because we were both in the accelerated academic

track we had a lot of the same teachers and so when I would get an A in Mr. So and so's chemistry class and he had gotten a B+ in another teacher's chemistry class, he was like, "Well my class was harder." There was just always a lot of these little subtle, you know, we're in competition and he had to prove that he was better than me in all accounts.

And I always took that as like he didn't really like me. But at the time I didn't really see it as competition it was like he doesn't want to associate with me. It wasn't until I got into college when I really began to realize my own relationship to him. And I just kind of stopped trying to communicate with him.

Actually it was like my freshman year I mean this is like a really key thing. So freshman year I actually had a boyfriend and which I'd never really had a boyfriend in high school. I went on like two dates or something.....This is Matt, he was my first real boyfriend. And we were really good friends more than anything else and my brother was like, "Oh, well," he asked me in a phone conversation, "Oh, so are you sleeping with him?" And I was like, "Why are you asking that?" And he said, "I want to know if my sister's a slut or not." And I'm like, (sighs) "Excuse me?!"

And then another point that same year he visited me at my school which was in our hometown. And we were walking around campus and it's a liberal arts college. He went to another university and I went to this college. And his school was an engineering college Midwestern solid school and so he's walking around with me [at her school]. And you know it's freaky people and he's like asking me if I was going to end up barefoot and pregnant and making planters. And he's

like, “Oh, yeah you’re freak friends,” stuff like that you know just constant sort of critique about me and my style or whatever. I think it was a lot of just negative language. I was ugly. I couldn’t sing. I was clumsy, you know.

[It was] never really addressed by my parents because I think that they didn’t see it or they didn’t hear it that much and I certainly wasn’t going and saying, “Oh, brother called me ugly.” And if I did mom would be like, “So what?” you know cause she kind of assumed that I wouldn’t internalize that. But I think I really did in a lot of ways because he was my major negative source and I was sort of seeking his approval as my sibling, my only sibling. . . . I think I just internalized it because I thought that was really [what he thought]. Like when he said that I was ugly and goofy and whatever you know and I was in high school, middle school I was like you know, “Yeah, ok so I’m ugly and I’m goofy so no one’s ever going to like me. But, ok fine.” Cause he’s the older brother and he knows better and you know he was getting pretty popular by that time and I was just still a geek nerd. (sighs)

Becka explained why her brother’s behavior was a reaction to his own insecurity:

I think we were just operating on such a different assumption you know. When we moved to the Midwest I was in fifth grade and he was in seventh grade. I got to go into grammar school. He had to go straight into middle school. We had been at a very small school overseas where my dad was working where we had classes of five. So it was a pretty big culture shock for both of us. And he dealt with it partly by internalizing it, bringing it home and taking it out on me. Like he’d come home and he’d punch me and then I’d be like, “Ow” and he’d be like, “That

didn't hurt! That's just nothing compared to what people do to you when you get to middle school." Cause he was like a little geek when he was a seventh grader and eighth grader. Then he got really big and handsome and popular (laughs).

Becka and Stuart have a much better relationship today than when they were children. Still, she believes that his emotional abuse of her set the stage for the relationship with Gregg, her ex-husband.

Significant Relationships

Becka estimated that she had had five romantic relationships. Her first relationship was with Matt, a fellow student. They were very good friends and the romance developed out of the friendship. They dated off and on over a period of a year and a half. When they were not seeing each other they would date other people. They remained friends through Becka's emotionally abusive marriage to Gregg. After the end of her first marriage, she and Matt began to see each other again. They later married and Matt is Becka's current husband.

Her second serious relationship and first marriage was with Gregg. They also met in college when he was a senior and Becka was a junior. Their relationship developed quickly and unexpectedly:

It was supposed to be a fling. You know, it was just I was going away. I was going to go to Europe for six months for a study program. And we [Gregg and her] met and we had been hanging out that semester. And within the first week of that relationship . . . cause we had a month off school and it was going to be just this short relationship. He [Gregg] said he loved me and it got more serious. And so by the time I left, he was kind of being like, "You know, I really don't want

you to go. I'm going to really miss you." I'm graduating and I don't know if I'll ever see you. I guess I'll have to stay in Richmond so that when you get back, I'll be able to see you." And at that time I was like, "Ok, well it will be good to see you." And then we wrote for six months while I was in Europe and he was very much, very like, "How much I miss you and life is terrible without you." And I fell in love with him while I was in Europe cause his letters were great. I mean he told me everything. How great I was. Then about five and a half months into it he met somebody cause he was so lonely. And I was glad for him to have a friend, actually about five months into it. And about five and a half months into it he was like, "Tina and I are, I'm going to stay here cause she's only a sophomore and she's got two more years. And I'll be staying for her." And I'm just like, (sighs) "Ok".

Becka and Gregg broke off while she was in Europe and Matt came over in the summer. She and Gregg initially did not talk when Becka returned to school. Slowly, however, they began to reconnect:

And then we got back together, you know, like when he didn't have any friends and I wanted to be his friend. So I tried to be his friend and do all these things, like I helped him move. And the whole time I'm helping him move he kept whining about how he didn't have any friends. [And she said], "I'm holding your sofa!" (sighs) And then from that it sort of transpired into dating again and then to having this sleeping together but no sex. And then he had sex casually with somebody else to punish me. And so then I started having sex with him. Makes a lot of sense.

Not long after this, Becka and Gregg moved in together. Then, soon after that they married.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

When asked what it would mean to her if someone said that they had been emotionally abused Becka said:

It would mean that they had been in a relationship with somebody, not necessarily a love relationship, it could be parent, that systematically depleted their emotional well-being in terms of like their feelings of self-worth and independence so that they questioned their abilities to accomplish anything outside of the relationship with that person.

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Gregg directed at Becka included: belittling, yelling, criticizing, discounting, verbally attacking, negating her feelings or ideas, isolating her from family and friends, attempting to restrict resources such as the telephone or finances, interfering with opportunities (i.e., jobs, medical care, education), accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him, having unrealistic expectations of her, directing dominating behaviors at her, humiliating her in front of people, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, sulking, withholding affection from her, ignoring her, expressing disgust towards her, expressing excessive jealousy towards her, labeling her in a negative way, driving recklessly to punish or scare her, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, and blaming her for his problems. Becka also added “interrupting her reading.”

Becka and Gregg spent most of their time together. This included socializing with friends, chores, and grocery shopping. His preferences dictated their food purchases:

(laughs) You know, thinking about it, we always bought Stone Wheat Thins because he liked this long skinny box. That was the type of cracker he really liked and they were the best. You know, I grew up really liking Town House Butter Wafers cause they're kind of softer, and we never bought them. And at the time, I didn't think about it as being anything other than he had convinced me that Stone Wheat Thins were "the cracker." But, I never really, I mean they're decent. They're not even a snack cracker because they're so hard. So, no, I mean it really wasn't negotiated at all, it wasn't negotiated what we got. We got what he ate. And we ate the way he ate. But I was just so flexible . . . (laughs) [It] just never really dawned on me, like I need to put my crackers in there.

At the time, Becka did not see Gregg's behavior as controlling or selfish:

So that was never like a sense . . . that I was being deprived of access to shopping by not having cash and personal supply thing. . . . But we bought the type of soap *that he had grown to like which was sandalwood soap from Thailand* (says with emphasis). Then, you know, I'd never had a real set regime, this is what I wanted or liked but. Oh there definitely was the trend in the household in terms of the kitchen in how we ate *what he was comfortable with and liked* (says with emphasis). While we were in it really didn't bother me. I really didn't like Stone Wheat Thins but that's all we ever bought for some reason. And yet I never really called him on it.

Becka's marriage to Gregg affected her employment decisions and opportunities:

Money-wise though there were tension points where I mean I worked ten hour days for four days a week doing day care with 22 three-year-olds. I was tired all

of the time. . . . And I earned minimum wage. So, I had a pretty high value on the money that I made in terms of that was hard-earned money. I don't even know, why did I end up working there? I mean I graduated with almost a 4.0 in biology and I'm working day care.

I need[ed] a job cause I was going to live with him. And somehow I didn't think it was worth trying to find a real job. The one real job [I] almost got was, I would have had to live on the other side of town from him . . . that wasn't a good idea. So I think I did sort of circumvent my looking for a job cause I knew I really needed to be living where he was living sort of thing. And he would spend the money on \$80 bottles of scotch. And I would be kind of upset because that was half my paycheck for a whole week. It was nothing to him.

Although Becka tried to maintain friendships when she was with Gregg she found it more difficult to get together with them:

. . . [A]t the beginning of the relationship, when we first moved in together [and] lived together for a couple months, and then we got married. . . . that first living together, it was so great. We did everything together. Didn't want to be a part. Never noticed that we didn't have any separate friends or do anything separately. Towards the end of it I need[ed] to go and visit my own friends. And yet it never happened. . . . [breathes in and pauses] I don't think I ever really tried to do much without Gregg. . . . [I would] feel guilty about the whole thing. So, he was very good at being sad and hurt and lonely. And you know, I wanted to spend time with my good female friend or I wanted to go spend time with the group of

friends that we had. He saw them as bad for me because they made me like him less.

The psychological manipulation was both continuous and episodic.

I wasn't crying and upset all the time or always trying to justify my feelings.....but I think it was continuous in the sense that he never let up. . . .

[H]e was always the hurt one. He was always the misunderstood one. He was always the one that wasn't loved. And he had no friends. No one cared about him. And so in that sense it was like this constant having to placate him.

And I'm not even fully aware how much I did compromise. Like you just start to live in such a way [that] you don't even let yourself realize you're making decisions and doing things in such a way [as] to not upset the person. But you are! The very purpose of making decisions to choose one job over another because the person won't accept you living in the same town but not with them. Or having to work a job where you're going to be gone for nights and days or something. You just start deleting options. It's not an option. It's just not an option. So in that sense I think it is continuous.

She elaborated on the idea of deleting options:

. . . [N]ot asking the person, "Is this an option or not?" And yeah, just not even thinking of them as an option. Like this is something we could sit down and discuss, you know. Like I could get this internship and go away for three months and we could discuss it as an option. You just don't even pretend it could be an option cause it's not. It's not an option the way the relationship is structured. You can't go away. . . . You have to be there.

Before Becka recognized Gregg's behavior as emotional abuse, she worked harder when there were problems. Yet this intensity drained her emotionally:

. . . [E]ven though I was working harder, at the same time I was pulling away. So it's like you're putting more and more energy outward towards the relationship but you're hollow inside. And there's no support for that energy finally I had to just totally go away because I was living outward and I had no internal energy.

Gregg's charge that Becka did not care about him hurt her the most:

That [was what] I think motivated me the most to try more. . . . I wasn't loving, or I didn't care, or I wasn't a friend. All those things led up [to] when we went from getting back to dating after I got back from Europe in December to being engaged on July 4th And that's with him having slept with someone else in the middle of that when I hadn't been having sex with him So my response to that was like, "Ok, you know, we'll be closer than ever because obviously it's sex. So I'll give that to him so he doesn't stray." . . . And when you look back you think, "Good Grief! . . . Gosh, I was a naive person!" I was just so clueless.

Gregg's "isolationist tactics" affected Becka the least. There were times she did not talk with friends regularly, but her closeness to friends did not depend on constant communication.

Gregg's possessiveness and determination to isolate Becka was evident early. After their wedding, they left for a much anticipated, honeymoon hike on the Appalachian Trail. Gregg cut the trip short:

. . . [W]e were supposed to go hiking for about five months. So we both quit our jobs and then were going to do this. But we only lasted for about two and a half

[months]. And that was 24-7 [refers to their time together]. Which very rapidly got bad . . . we didn't have similar hiking styles. I really liked it. It was the best experience. I was very comfortable meeting people. And we started hiking with some other people.

I remember he was very upset when this woman who was hiking alone . . . within the first week ended up hiking with us for almost a week. And he didn't like that. I don't know if it was so much he didn't like her or he didn't like us having company. Then [at] another point we met up with a group of people . . . on the trail. And that was when he accused me of liking someone [another man on the trail] we had just met more than liking him.

At that point, I was having a really good time talking to this new person. Well, maybe *I've been hiking with you now for two months* (says with emphasis) (laughs). You know, I can talk to somebody else. I can sit next to him and cook instead of sitting up on the shelter floor and cook next to you. Anyway, I had less forgiveness for his [Gregg's], petty whining while we were hiking. So then he decided he wanted to quit. And I agreed to quit with him [voice fades]. I guess I figured it wasn't kosher for me to continue our honeymoon trip alone.

Gregg also engaged in a pattern of psychological manipulation:

. . . [W]e had dated as juniors, Gregg and I. I had gone to Europe. I came back from Europe. He broke up with me while I was in Europe [when Becka got back and they started talking again] He would say things like, "I have no friends. You're not my friend." And I would be like, "No, I really support you even though we're not dating now." Then at some point, we were talking and he said

to me, “You’ll never get married cause you’re incapable of love.” And very, very shortly after that, it intensified our relationship and I started having sex with him again. I was trying to prove that I was capable of loving him.

Even when Becka tried to call Gregg on behavior that was clearly problematic, he labeled her as the perpetrator:

We got in a big argument, no, we’d been in a car, he had yelled at me.....and that evening I was saying, “You know yelling is the worse thing you can do. I mean it just closes me down. My family didn’t really yell. You know, I didn’t grow up in a yelling atmosphere. I was just somebody venting, you know blah, blah, whatever.” Yelling to me is like this ultimate problem. So I was saying you know, “I can’t deal with the yelling. Just don’t yell.”

And then Gregg is saying, “Ok, you’re telling me I’m a bad person. I can’t help yelling because you frustrated me so much. I’m just so frustrated with you.” And so then I said, “Oh, well I’m really, really sorry I frustrate you. I don’t mean to frustrate you. I’ll try not to frustrate you. I’m sorry I frustrate you.” And Gregg says, “Ok. Good.”

So somehow you know, I end up being the one in trouble in that. He had worked it back to where it was my fault. . . . But in that whole conversation he never apologized for yelling, ever.....I’m culpable and I’ve admitted it so . . . there’s no need for him to apologize.

Not being heard and not having her feelings acknowledged by Gregg affected how Becka saw herself:

(laughs) I.....was.....a.....flake, indecisive. I, obviously didn't know what I wanted. I had no goals in life. I was unlovable by anybody except the most patient man who was the one who had married me. And I would always ask him, you know, he'd say, "I love you." And I would say, "Well, why?" I mean that became a very constant question, "Well, why?" Cause I think I really didn't understand because I had become so self-doubting I couldn't really understand what it was, how he could say he loved me.....when obviously I was so unlovable.

And.....that was one of the things that drove him crazy. It really made him upset that I would ask why, why. I don't know why he would find it so hard to explain why to tell me what it was that was good about me. [He couldn't] counteract all the negative things that he had been telling me to make me feel bad.

Some friends recognized the abusive dynamic in Becka's marriage:

Well, one of them, well, it was a group. They lived together. Two of the guys worked for MSV, Men Stopping Violence. And then my female friend had done an advocates [advocacy work with women]. Basically they were all trying to get me to move out and come live with them. Because they all saw and, I mean it got to the point where a couple of them said, we don't want to be around the two of you together. They didn't like to be around us cause they didn't like the way we interacted. And of course I took that to mean they didn't like me for awhile. Then they told me it was because they didn't like Gregg. And then I had to defend Gregg. It was like, "No, he's really great, he's really nice." And Gregg was very hostile to them and accuse me of purposefully turning and making them not like him. Telling them things, and doing all this. And then I would go out of my way

to try and tell them all the good things about him. It was like no, this is a good, positive relationship. (laughs) It was hard but at the same time they were the ones that made me read this book [Patricia Evans's *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*], yeah. If you need a place to stay, you can stay with us, stuff like that.

In addition to giving Becca reading material, her friends gave her the space to come to her own conclusions and make her own choices:

They never said this is what he's doing. This is how it is, that sort of thing . . . and I was over there towards the end [of the relationship] and I'd be crying and be trying to explain something and I'd feel like I was totally crazy and blowing something totally out of proportion. And I'm trying to figure it out, how can he not understand that I do care about him. I'm all the time trying to explain to my friends, talking [about] what's wrong with me and all this stuff. And they're probably, thinking back on it, they're probably going, "Figure it out!", you know. But none of them ever came right out and said, "This is what he's doing. You need to leave him." They let me kind of learn on my own. And they never said point-blank But the one, he gave me the book which was really, really helpful.

Becca also found support at a feminist retreat camp where she went with the same friends:

And we did a trip together, which I never heard the end of from Gregg. We went to Sister Spirit Camp. And we did work. I came back all pumped up. And it was like, "Yahhh! I built a deck and I did all this great stuff." Then the first thing

Gregg told me was, “Well, I don’t see how it’s such a great place because I called and they told me that you weren’t there because I asked for you and they said you weren’t there.” And he got really accusatory about how they had hidden me from him or something. He just asked for me by the wrong name cause I had a nickname from college that I was using. (laughs)

This experience was a turning point for Becka. She said, “. . . [T]hat was at the beginning of the long death. But it stretched on for another year.”

Becka took several trips over the next year. She went back to Sister Spirit Camp for several weeks to volunteer again. She went hiking on the Appalachian trail, completing the hike she began on her honeymoon. Becka noticed that she felt good when she was at Sister Spirit Camp or hiking without Gregg and unhappy when she was with him:

I went back to Sister Spirit Camp for six weeks while he was job searching and traveling. And again, I got really like, I feel powerful and strong. And then I’d go back and we lived together for three months and by the time I felt like really bad. And when I went hiking on the Appalachian trail for a couple months I had enough chutzpah to go back the next year and say, “I’m going to finish this.” So I went back out and of course I never heard the end of that because I wasn’t with him and he was doing his job. It was endless. . . . I was like this is what I want in the relationship, I’m going to go back for a couple of months [hiking] through December and, I mean, it was just going nowhere.

Becka credits Patricia Evans’s book as helping her to see Gregg’s behavior as emotionally abusive. She tried to recall when that happened:

I'm trying to think when I was given the book. . . . So it was about three years in. And that's when I tried to call him on things and he would get very accusatory. And I was calling him a bad person. And it's not his fault it's my fault because I made him do it. (laughs)

Her view of emotional abuse changed over time. Becka said:

Well, it went from (laughs) not knowing about it to knowing about it. And I think my view of it was very much grounded in that book in terms of understanding the range of what behaviors could constitute. And (sighs) now, you know, I'm so far removed from that sort of situation. . . . [B]ut I think I've gotten even more sensitive to hearing people say negative things to each other. . . . it still tenses me out to hear like a couple and hear one of them be spiteful or negative to the other in public. Cause I'm like, ok, are they just having a bad day or is this a chronic pattern? (laughs)

Becka recalled another incident that was a turning point in her awareness:

Later on when we were married there was an incident where I just think it was the closest, it was the time I felt like the most certain about what was going on. We were in the car and we were bickering about where to have lunch. And he started yelling at me because I wouldn't eat at a Thai restaurant because I wanted a sandwich for lunch. I don't know if I can come up with the exact words. . . . for that but you know, just yelling. And at that point I remember thinking if he would just hit me, then I, then I could leave. Because at that point, I didn't really recognize what was going on in my mind the lines were don't, don't hang out with someone who hits you. But the idea of like being yelled at or being

systematically told that you're wrong in your ideas, and stuff like that. He would always contradict me when I made statements. I would be talking about something and he would say, "No, it's not really that way."

Becka also recalled Gregg's unwillingness to give her private space in their house, though he had a home office:

. . . [S]o part of what had been being discussed was issues of space and privacy and I had been asking him at one point like if I had my own office and I shut the door and that was my space would he not come in? And he was like, "I don't want to live [like] that."

Becka then described when she left the marriage:

. . . [T]here was '96 blizzard in the Northeast and our town along the mid-Atlantic coast was iced in. And he didn't go to work for a week. And I hadn't started my job yet. I had just gotten a job at a bookstore. I'd gone and I'd gotten it on Monday. My first day was supposed to be Thursday. I went in for ½ a day but the store was closed. He was home that whole week. And he was working on his computer in his office the whole time. I was downstairs reading. We met for dinner.

One of the nights, we're sitting there talking and he says, the first thing that comes out of his mouth, the only thing that comes out of his mouth, he looks at me and says, "Aren't you even going to try to communicate?" I remember that was just like the end..... "*Aren't I even going to try to com[municate], yeah I haven't said anything but neither have you!*" [Becka says with emphasis]

And.....that Saturday I went up stairs to talk to him . . . to ask him what he was

doing, he's like, "Well I don't have to tell you. If you can have your own space then I don't see why I need to." You know, and I was like, "You know, whatever." So I went back downstairs. So then he came downstairs to talk to me. I was reading and he opened with something like (pauses and sighs) I've [refers to herself] totally just blocked this out. He ended up storming out of the house. He was going to go for a walk. And that was when I was just like I need to leave. And so when he came back I told him that I was going to leave. That night, I slept in a separate room from him which was really hard cause the whole night I was like, "I've got to go in there and comfort him. He's really upset. I've got to go comfort him." Yeah, oh yeah that's right cause I set up in the spare room.

There was a spare room [that] had a bunch of boxes in it but no furniture, no anything. And no ability really to set it up as my office. I didn't have any money to set it up and I didn't have the hutzpah to say, "I need to buy a desk I want to set up my space." So you know, he had his office we had a bedroom and we had this room that had all my boxes in it.

So, I had my sleeping bag on the floor in there and he came to the door that night and he's like I was the shallowest person he'd ever met and devoid of emotion. So of course the whole night I'm like I've got to go in there and prove that I have feelings for him.

. . . [T]he next morning [I] got up and packed the car, gave him a hug and.....then the whole time he was kind of watching me as I'm doing it. I felt like I should be really sad, but I was empty. I just was so empty. *There was nothing left* (says with emphasis). I mean it was like that or be dead . . . But even

now I had enough from having read the book and all my friends and having hiked. And I knew that I was right and that I really wasn't shallow. I was still really, really hurt that he believed that. And I wanted somehow to convince him to, you know, you gotta, "You know it's not just me! Work with me!" But I knew that [I] . . . couldn't, that it wasn't going to happen, that I could give and give and give and four years down the line it would be the same thing. . . . [A]nd he came out and he knelt by the car door. Then I'm sitting there and the station wagon is all packed up. I'm sitting there looking at these big puppy dog eyes. And I said, "I can't leave with you sitting there." He got up and left which was good because I wouldn't have been able to drive away if he had just stood there.

So, in a lot of ways I think he was ready for it to be over too, because I wasn't complicit enough any more. (laughs) I'd stopped being as malleable as I was when we were first together.

Even though a part of Becka was rock-solid that this was the right thing to do, another part of her was uncertain. These two emotions converged as she drove to her parents' house:

And in the driving there were a lot of times when I wanted to turn around and go back but I knew that I couldn't because he could never forgive me for even have started to. And so that would become another just thing. And I knew that we [couldn't] do counseling because he had agreed to go to counseling, but he didn't believe in counseling. So then I was also very terrified of going away. When I was driving . . . I was very scared about that possibility of going back. And it almost happened.

Up until the last moment Becka struggled with her decision to divorce. But it almost didn't happen because I went to the divorce hearing alone. I didn't want anybody to go with me. I didn't tell anybody until the day before. And it came time and the judge just said, "Blah, blah, blah." And I'm like in tears because they ask you all these questions about is it irreconcilable. And I'm crying. And he's [the judge], "Are you sure that this is what you want?" And I'm like, "Yeah," cause it's like if I don't do it he's [Gregg] going to be mad at me. It was terrible.

Becka speculated that Gregg's abusive behavior was rooted in insecurity:

It occurred because Gregg was not self-sufficient in his capacity to care about himself. He *needs—somebody—there* (says with emphasis). He needs support. It's like a child in various ways. Dependent. Needy. He always wants not a mother-figure, but just somebody to take care of him and just really that sort of, even though he controls the money and did the driving and stuff, I think that nurturing care. He wanted someone to care for him so much and feared that it couldn't happen.....Fear of loss. You know, he was always, "You're going to leave me! You're going to leave me!" . . . He never could believe that you cared and that therefore it was ok to just let the relationship be what it was going to be [T]hat fear of being left for whatever reason, makes him try all the harder to make sure that the person is bound to him. And I kept going away and I kept leaving and coming back and leaving and coming back. And I didn't really realize it at the time that that was *so* (says with emphasis), it must have been terrifying for him. For me, I felt such security in that I cared about him and that we had this relationship and that we're working on something. Because you know it's like

even though we had problems, I mean we had committed and we were married and there's that thing and even beforehand, if you say you're with somebody, then you are, whether you're there or not. You know you should trust.

Gregg's criticism and manipulation left Becka feeling vulnerable. Although she is no longer in the marriage, these feelings have re-surfaced in other relationships. She recalled an experience with a professor in graduate school:

. . . [M]y first advisor . . . actually turned out to be . . . he was quite controlling. And.....I was pretty vulnerable to a lot of things that he said, the criticisms of the way I was approaching my work. He said that I didn't act professionally when I talked to other professors about their projects. I didn't know at the time that he had a lot of bad relationships with those professors in the Department. He thought he was being ostracized and that people were trying to take his students away from him. And so he was taking a lot of it out on me.

That experience, as well as her marriage, helped Becka understand that people sometimes act out of motives or with agendas:

I have to remind myself over and over again that not everybody cares about other people. And not everybody acts with the best interests of anybody but themselves in mind. And sometimes when it comes to mind and I have to look around, I'm like, "Oh my gosh!" you know? Cause I'm sitting there thinking here we all are in class and we all care about each other and we're all thinking positive things about each other.

Perception of Self

Initially Becka was very self-critical about how she had treated Gregg. She engaged in self-blaming:

Even after I left [the marriage] I was like I want to be your friend. You know, you can talk to me. I was much more critical of myself and what had happened and having not somehow be[en] more reassuring up front, you know. Like, maybe when I went to Europe since I was really interested in continuing the relationship with Gregg, I shouldn't have allowed Matt to come over and hike with me. I was very critical. . . . I really was questioning that. You know, if I had been more clingy up front would he have been different?

She has moved beyond this perspective over time:

But I managed to maintain some level of like, "Well, no, I'm not going to tell my friend [Matt], who I've known for three years, who's made plans, and has invested in spend[ing] six weeks with me that he can't come because this person [Gregg] that I've dated *for a month* (says with emphasis) is jealous." You know, I'm not, I wasn't comfortable with that. You don't do that to a friend. . . . I was like, well you know if Gregg and I are together and we're going to get back together. Then Matt and I are just going to travel together. I mean, who knows he might pick up some woman half way through and whatever. But you know I don't think, Gregg could [ever] accept that from the get-go. So I think there were a lot times when I was like, "Oh, you know, I handled, I really wanted my relationship with Gregg to work. I should have been more in to it from the beginning." And I don't think that now. It doesn't matter what I had done. He still would have been

insecure. As I've grown away from it and been able to analyze it and step back and look at the whole thing that there really was so much insecurity from the get-go even before he [Gregg] and I dated that manifested itself in how he thought about what would happen between Matt and I if we traveled. [Al]though I committed myself to Gregg by letter and all this sort of stuff that. So I'd say what's changed, I'm much more comfortable. . . . No, I made good decisions. I made right decisions.

At the time she was leaving the marriage Becka was in a dialogue with herself about what she should do. Part of her saw things one way--a negative view of herself--another part of Becka saw herself positively. That part of Becka was aware of the strengths and abilities. She described leaving:

Well at the end when I was getting ready to leave and I was.....so.....crazy, just so distraught with all this self-doubt. . . . I told Gregg I have to leave or I have to kill myself.....none of my ideas of relationships line up with what is going on here But underneath all that craziness, *I knew that I was a strong person and that I could deal with it* (says with emphasis). And that whatever I did I could handle it And I don't know like I'd always done well academically I'd done pretty much, pretty well at anything I've tried. I know I can learn. I've got a good memory. And so I had a fundamental belief in my ability to accomplish what I set myself to do. And so even though it was really scary and like, oh, I'll never have anybody to love me again. I'm such a worthless piece of whatever because that's obviously what Gregg had been telling me all along. And there's all that running around in your head and that fear of being alone and being unsuccessful and

starting again cause I had no career. And Gregg's the one with the money. All that! But underneath it was like, "I can do anything." I was like I can go to my parents and if that doesn't work out then I can go to the feminist work camp and they'll be willing to help me get on my feet. And my friends. I just knew that between myself I had this support network. That there [was a] support [net]work there because I was actually a decent person and I had people that cared about me. So, I don't know if that was really a strength other than the strength of believing in one's self and one's social connectedness that one has value.

Although it was hard, Becca knew she could deal with it. Since Gregg had fought to keep the money they had accumulated, she knew she would have to start over. Becca was worried but she believed in herself. She would also have the support of her friends and the women at Sister Spirit Camp.

Becca moved back to her parents' house during the separation from Gregg. Her parents did not understand emotional abuse and they initially urged against a divorce:

. . .[Y]ou know my parents were definitely pushing for reconciliation, and wanted us to go to this Christian counseling sessions for troubled couples. And [her mother was] just leaving literature all over the house about how God hates divorce and stuff like that. So of course, that was really disempowering. And when I tried to explain to her [Becca's mother] what had gone on, she had no ability to understand the concept of emotional abuse. . . . I tried to explain to my mom about what all this is. And say like, "Well ok, like he yelled at me," and you know, "or I felt belittled and all." And, [mom replied] "You just have to be more forgiving." You know, it's just like, in her eyes *it was really about that I was not*

forgiving enough and that I wasn't accepting enough of difference and I wasn't compromising (says with emphasis). And that was really hard because I felt like *I had been really compromising* (says with emphasis). And of course Gregg had said that to me.

Becka's parents are members of a conservative branch of the Presbyterian Church. Her mother had, ". . . had a re-birth experience." and believed that, "The Bible's 100% true." Becka felt so brow-beaten with "marriage is forever," "God hates you if you get divorced" sort of literature that she finally got her own place. Her mother eventually had an awakening about emotional abuse:

And my mom, who does Christian outreach and counseling with families, encountered this woman who she had become friends with [and who] had a physically abusive partner or spouse. And my mom ended up sending away for Christian and Evangelist literature how to deal with someone like this. Because she'd never . . . [t]his is just not normal. So, she was reading that, she's a big reader. And luckily this [place] sent a whole bunch of literature about emotional abuse too. And so she was reading all this stuff for the first time. She came to me later and she was just like, "I'm sorry and I understand now. And," you know, "God forgives you (laughs)." I was like, "Ok, mom. Thanks for all your support!" (laughs)

So, but that's probably one of my motivations for all this [doing the interview] is that I feel like we know a lot about physical violence but for a lot of women it's just, you don't know to notice those things. You wouldn't think that the person you're with thinks you're dumb or ugly or incapable and no one else

would love you or any of those things. And so you just say to yourself, “Good, good, this person really loves me because they love me and they care about me but they think that I am scatterbrained and that I’m uncompromising and stubborn. Wow they’re really great people for loving such a jerk like me. I should try harder! (laughs) And try harder!!”

There were several things that Becca found helpful in moving beyond the abuse. She listed the book by Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, as an important resource. Becca also credited time as being very helpful in her recovery. Although frustrated with her mother’s religious views, Becca did find one of her mother’s resources helpful:

Mom sent me to this Christian counselor and he had me reading this Christian stuff which was, it was pretty good cause he didn’t go straight to the divorce as a bad thing. But he actually went straight to something on personal self-worth and he recognized where I was at. So he was working, of course it was all through the relationship with Jesus but that’s still about recognizing yourself. And I think that sort of stuff . . . really helped reinforce that it wasn’t just me and that there were these fundamental differences in application and behavior and personalities between Gregg and I which really set this up. And that it’s not my fault that I didn’t see it.

Becca said that societal pressure influenced her experience. In fact, she had never wanted to be married. She had imagined that she would be single, at least for a number of years: “I was never really a person who was seeking a boyfriend or wanting to be

involved. It was kind of like, it kind of happened to me.” This sudden movement into marriage left Becca confused:

. . . [W]hen we got married I had all this tension about marital roles and being the wife and you know, what did that mean? And you know, who am I? And am I Mrs. Gregg? I felt so terrible and down all the time about it.

Becca’s experience with her second husband, Matt, is different:

With Matt I still didn’t want to be married, except I wanted to be married to him. And it just confirmed what we were always doing which was that we were committed to each other.

But with Gregg . . . I was more aware subconsciously aware early on in my relationship with Gregg that there were a lot of things wrong because that came out in that tension of being married. . . . So I think I knew subconsciously that these problems were there. And I felt trapped and, and closed in. . . . *I was becoming his wife* (says with emphasis). That was what I was. There was nothing else to my life besides being Gregg’s wife, taking care of him, taking care of the house. *Making sure that his life went smoothly* (says with emphasis) (sighs and laughs).

Becca’s life is quite different now. She credited Matt with helping her to move past the emotional abuse in her marriage to Gregg. She feels supported in what she does. Becca and Matt trust each other and are both in graduate school. They have different academic pursuits and this may mean that they are separated for a few months at a time.

Jordan

Jordan is a 34-year-old single woman of medium height. When she laughs, her entire body shakes, her face lights up and her eyes sparkle.

She chose to be interviewed at a mutually agree upon office site. At each interview, Jordan arranged the pillows on the couch to her liking, kicked off her Birkenstocks, and pulled her feet up to her side. She appeared comfortable and relaxed from the start. Jordan sipped leisurely from a glass of ice. She seemed thoughtful and looked around in the air above her. There were often extended periods of silence between Jordan's response to the questions.

Jordan disclosed that she was in therapy and it was through her job in a social service agency that she first began to identify what she had experienced as emotional abuse. She expressed interest in the study because she hoped that sharing her experience would help others.

Jordan was with her emotionally abusive boyfriend Jeff for about two years. She has been out of that relationship for several years and was currently single.

Family of Origin

Jordan grew up in a family of four, the youngest of two children. She has a brother who is two years older. She described a childhood without much structure and little parental supervision:

. . . [M]y family of origin's a (laughs) whole another story. I was particularly I think.....um,.....well no, I would say pretty much my whole childhood I did whatever I wanted. And.....it was definitely.....I mean I had an abusive childhood. There was.....um,.....my mom didn't, I mean I think particularly,

I'm thinking of like elementary school. And then I know like I mean after school I did what ever I wanted. I went out and me and my brother we played in the neighborhood and did whatever we wanted to do. And it's there.....And there wasn't a lot of control. There wasn't, well at least early on, there wasn't a lot of control. There [weren't] boundaries and structure and discipline and all those kind of things. So we pretty much.....did what we wanted. And I did make those decisions. And then later I.....mean as a teenager I was more under my dad's control but we.....I never had a curfew, you know, any of that kind of thing. So me and my friends, we did what ever we wanted to.

Her parents divorced when she was young and Jordan was left to make her own decisions. Childhood, she said, did not prepare her to have healthy relationships.

Significant Relationships

Jordan estimated that she had been involved in about eight relationships, four of which were serious and four of which were casual. The serious relationships ranged from two years to five years in length. The other relationships usually lasted less than a year. Many of Jordan's relationships were overlapping. She has never been married.

For Jordan, serious relationships developed, "pretty quickly," meaning within, "a couple of months." Although she does not feel that she has, "had a lot of healthy relationships," Jordan has tried to maintain her independence. The relationship with Jeff, however, was the exception:

I mean he definitely had control over me. So, that.....I mean yeah, I'd always been fairly independent and free. And made my own way and whatever. So, it

was very different. I mean.....thinking about.....all your actions kind of depending on someone else.

Jordan described her serious relationships as having a pattern of “non-endings,” that is they ended without a conversation or specific closure. She described one experience:

We didn't have a specific breakup. He moved out of state and it was kind of unresolved. And then I kind of realized when he was gone that (laughs) this isn't so great. And I actually just like never talked to him again and I ended up moving and not telling him where I was (laughs).

A five-year relationship also ended strangely:

The five year was, we were close but it was really on-again-off-again, that whole thing. And he actually just disappeared from my life. I never heard from him again. And I mean we had like plans to get together one weekend and he never showed up. Then I tried to contact him for several months and never knew anything.

Jordan met Jeff, her emotionally abusive boyfriend, through a mutual friend. She was deeply attracted to him immediately: “And I just got totally drawn in to it. And.....felt like, I mean I had strong feelings for him, and wanted to be in a committed relationship with him. *And.....he was not committed to me* (says with emphasis).” Jeff lived in another state so at first the relationship was long distance. After six months Jeff moved to the same town where Jordan lived. Although they never lived together, he spent a lot of time at her house.

Jordan believed that living separately allowed Jeff to, “. . . do whatever he wanted, to whoever he wanted, and let me in to his world, when he felt like it.” Their relationship ended abruptly:

“ . . . a non-ending as well. I mean he was very much in control. So.....he ended up leaving me one night when we were out together. He went home with a friend of mine and slept with her. And (laughs).....then he just kind of got involved with her. And so I mean it was pretty much over. But.....I mean, it was because of him. I would have stayed with him. So, it just kind of ended like that.....I quit talking to him. But it was all on his terms.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

Jordan was emotionally abused in two of her relationships. One was the relationship with Jeff. The other was a relationship with Marvin, who was also physically abusive. The physical abuse was the reason Jordan left the relationship: “I broke up with him. I.....I mean the physically abusive incidents, were really in like the last couple weeks of our relationship. And I just told him that I didn’t want to see him anymore and kind of left.”

From the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors Jordan identified several behaviors that she had experienced with both Marvin and Jeff. In addition to shoving and throwing Jordan across the room, Marvin, directed the following behaviors at her: belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticizing her, isolating her from family and friends, accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him, throwing objects (not necessarily at her), discounting, negating her feelings or ideas, verbally attacking her, having unrealistic expectations of her, directing dominating

behaviors towards her, saying negative things about her, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, ignoring her, slamming objects or doors, and interrupting her sleeping or eating habits.

Similar emotionally abusive behaviors occurred in Jordan's relationship with Jeff. From the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors, she reported that Jeff engaged in the following: belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticizing, monitoring her time and activities, throwing objects (not necessarily at her), discounting, negating her feelings or ideas, verbally attacking her, having unrealistic expectations of her, directing dominating behavior towards her, humiliating her in front of people, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, withholding affection from her, ignoring her, slamming objects or doors, ridiculing her, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, expressing excessive jealousy, labeling her in a negative way, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, and withholding sex. Jeff was never physically abusive to Jordan, yet he often got into bar fights with others. Jordan never felt physically threatened by him.

Jordan defined emotional abuse as someone controlling another person and "dominating the relationship" by being emotionally forceful and aggressive,

. . . just ruling the relationship. Everything being on his terms . . . I mean doing everything that he said. I mean totally, I don't know, being vulnerable. . . . I didn't ever feel threatened [or] powerless. I mean he just really had control over me. I was totally sucked in, and just powerless to mak[e] changes. [H]e totally used me. I was available for whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted and couldn't walk away.

Jordan entered the relationship with Jeff while in her mid-twenties. This experience had, she believed, had the negative impact on self-perception:

I mean with Jeff I was just got so sucked in. I just had I really wanted to be with him and be in a serious relationship and so, you know, I very much.....wanted to please him and do whatever he asked and.....um, you know so I definitely let myself be used and um, certainly had a big effect on my self-esteem. You know it felt very much like I needed him. [I] apologized for my own actions. Forgave him for anything he did.You know, if anything was wrong it was my fault. [I].....would have done anything for him. I mean anything he asked me to do, I would have done.

Jordan described the abuse as “pervasive” and “continuous.” She could not remember how it started but she eventually realized that it was there right from the start. The long-distance nature of the relationship prevented her from “seeing” Jeff’s behavior as abusive:

I think that.....I don’t think that I was aware of what was going on until I was so far into it that, you know, it was at the point where I couldn’t do anything about it. I guess that’s kind of what I mean. I don’t really know how it started or when it started. And but you know thinking about it, from the very beginning, you know, he made all the decisions. Everything was, you know, was his say and.....even things that.....you know, anything that I suggested, anything that I brought up, it was always no. But then sometimes we might end up doing that very thing. (laughs)

When Jeff lived out of town, he did not always come to Jordan's town for the weekend but he expected her to be home waiting for his call. If he called and she was not there, Jeff left angry messages demanding to know where she was and why she was not at home: "Yeah. I mean I [was] supposed to be available for him all the time for whatever he wanted. You know, if we weren't together, I wasn't supposed to be doing anything else."

Jeff had total control of their relationship. he decided whether they would spend time with friends or alone, where they would go, what they would do. He even controlled the affection in their relationship:

Depending on you know, who was around.....you know, what was going on and.....you know and that was all on his terms as well. I mean I had to wait for him to be affectionate with me. If I initiated anything, then he would just like freeze me out.

Jordan's love for and desire to be with Jeff encouraged an obsession about pleasing him:

I mean he also dominated my thoughts, you know, I thought about him all the time. You know, is this going to make him happy? And.....if I do this is it going to bother him? And that kind of thing.

Because Jeff was a "sick person" and she was emotionally vulnerable, Jordan said,

I fell right into the trap. It was like I was under his spell. I mean I think it was easy for him.....to keep abusing me and keep using me cause I never fought back.....and he certainly didn't see that he was doing anything wrong. . . . [I]t just became the pattern of our relationship.

Of the experience with Jeff, Jordan has found his controlling behavior to be the most difficult from which to recover.

Jordan did not identify Marvin's emotionally abusive behaviors as abusive until much later:

It ended physically and on my terms and so I don't think I ever compared it to the relationship [with Jeff]. . . . I don't know even though I walked away, you know, at the end of the relationship [with Marvin] I think that gave me the sense of having more control over the relationship than I really did.And so.I mean then when I got involved with [Jeff], I mean I didn't recognize really any of the same behaviors at all.

Jordan did not recognize Jeff's behavior as emotionally abusive until she was out of the relationship and working in a social service agency. This job raised her consciousness of abuse and brought her to a gradual acceptance of her own experience. Before Jordan understood that she had been abused, she felt guilt about not having met Jeff's needs and sad that the relationship ended. Her view of the relationship and what constitutes emotional abuse has changed significantly.

Perception of Self

The effects of the emotional abuse touched many areas of Jordan's life, especially in her relationships with other people and with herself:

I mean definitely [had].difficulty trusting people.(clears throat).it's greatly affected my.sense of security.being able to.you know, depend on someone, rely on someone.more

difficulty in expressing myself, my emotions,.....with sharing with someone else, [and] being intimate with someone,.....those are the main things.

She came to doubt herself as a decision-maker:

But I think some of it was subtle too and.....it's like I knew I had to wait for him to.....decide, what we were doing, where we were going to go or, you know, what he wanted me to do.....and even if we weren't together, you know, I was expected to be at home or you know, available to him. So,you know, I knew I couldn't go out and do whatever I wanted. I just kind of had to wait for him.

And.....I think that made me feel less capable. I couldn't do things on my own.

After the relationship ended, Jordan was depressed and “closed off” from other people. It took awhile to reconnect with friends, to stop blaming herself for the problems in the relationship, and to recognize that Jeff, “. . . had his own issues.” Changing jobs and a new set of friends gave Jordan a new perspective on things and “. . . helped her feel better about herself.”

In the next romantic relationship she took things slowly and, “. . . [E]very step we made in our relationship was a really big deal.” Jordan rebuilt her trust and sense of safety within a relationship. She also noticed how nice it was to have a new partner who did not yell or accuse her of something.

Currently, Jordan sees herself in a positive light. She continues to work on trusting herself, and increasing her self-confidence. She is completely herself and open with people. She also speaks up for herself when things are not working well in relationships.

Jordan received little support from family and friends in dealing with the abuse. These might have been because she did not ask for help. Furthermore, several of her friends may not have recognized it as emotional abuse, as they, “. . . were all (laughs) in crappy relationships.”

In looking back over her experiences, Jordan felt that her experience in emotionally abusive relationships encouraged her to learn about healthy relationships. She feels clearer about what she wants in a relationship and about what she is not willing to accept. She also desires to get on with life. She now holds people responsible for their own behavior. She credits time and the support of a friend with helping her to get beyond the abuse.

Lori

Lori is a 43 year-old woman who teaches middle-school at a private institution in the area. She was petite and plump. Warm and welcoming, Lori laughed often. Her voice, on the telephone and in person, had a melodic quality reminiscent of a stream or brook running over rocks. Originally from the Midwest, Lori has lived in the South for nearly two decades. She has one child, a daughter.

The interviews were conducted at her work space in the middle of the day when she had a break. Lori adjusted the thermostat a couple of times. She also pointed to and explained some of the tools she used in her job.

Lori wanted to help others avoid emotionally abusive relationships. She hoped that the information she shared would be used to educate the public about emotional abuse and its effects.

She was married to her emotionally abusive ex-husband Kyle for nine years. Lori has dated since the divorce from Kyle. She is not currently in a relationship.

Family of Origin

Lori grew up in a two-parent family with two older sisters. She explained that it was a good childhood in many ways. Lori received adequate physical care but described her mother as emotionally abusive:

. . . [S]till there's a lot worse stories than mine. I was not treated badly . . . and you know I had everything I ever needed. My mother (sighs) was a very good provider. I mean I was perfectly dressed and fed and clothed and had all of my physical needs answered but I never felt like I had a mother.

Even today I have a very limited relationship with my mother. Now that my dad's dead I consider her [a] friend. But I don't talk to her about my problems . . . because I know what she's going to say, you know? She's just going to (laughs) not say anything really helpful. She's going to just point out how could I let this happen. Why would I even be involved with somebody like that. Instead of working, this is the problem let's work through it, she wants to go back. And she's very critical.

I think that I didn't have an education that I was coming from a background that was setting me up for emotional abuse because I didn't consider it to be abuse. They spanked me three times in my life. That's the only time they ever hit me. I was never cut off from any money. Yes, my mother would get mad at me and not talk to me, and she was horribly criticizing of me.

. . . [W]ell this was the biggest piece . . . it's like if you didn't imitate my mother, if you didn't reflect her back to her she considered that she had not done her job. And that you were off the track. Ok? So for example, religion, I rejected being a Baptist, pretty early on, you know, when I got it that they didn't you know really let me make choices (laughs). It was really hard for me to remain. And *to this day* (says with emphasis) she says that she has failed me spiritually, you know.

Religion was the center of Lori's mom's life and a point of conflict between them: I can remember saying to her, she kept saying to me, "Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" And I said, "You know, I can't have a savior because honestly that just keeps me hanging on. You know, waiting for the day of [exaltation] when I have got to exalt myself and you know, I think that that was a metaphor for us to save ourselves." And of course, that's blaspheme to her. But, hey, enough! (laughs) I'm living the results of waiting to be having a savior. I mean, Kyle [her emotionally abusive ex-husband] was my savior. I mean here he was. He was going to come in and take care of me and drove me right into the ground.

Lori's relationship with her dad was not overtly conflictual. In fact, she admired him:

He was the silent one. I had a better relationship with my dad than I had with my mother. But my dad was always the silent enforcer. And I don't know, I think they both equally felt the same about marriage, that they totally disbelieved in people living together. To them, well to her it was sinful to him.....he

just.....didn't think that it was right, you know. He thought that it was, but of course he was a very honorable man. I mean he honored his marriage.

I know that Kyle was a complete surprise to my family that anybody could act that horrible. I mean, they had a level of horribleness (laughs) that they tolerated but my father never went out on my mother. He never had other women. He, you know, he honored her at every Christmas, every holiday, every anniversary. He really had a deep love for her even though they had a very complicated relationship and it was tumultuous.

But he was an alcoholic that got really, really bad but he had taken himself to AA and had done redemption. And [he] was sober for 33 years. And that's the thing. Then I grew up in the post-alcoholic family without getting treatment and she became the dry drunk and that's why she was the way she was, over-critical all that stuff.

So, but you know, they were still very, very family-oriented. They would have never divorced. He never quit, you know, supporting the family doing what he had to do because he had a *serious code of honor* (says with emphasis). I just don't think that he believed that somebody wouldn't have a code of honor, somewhere, you know. He would have never ever agreed for me to marry Kyle if he had known. I mean he wouldn't have. And neither did my mother. They didn't want that for me, you know. So, it was strange.

Surviving an emotionally abusive marriage has given Lori a better understanding of the emotional abuse she experienced from her mother. She has used this knowledge to change her interactions with her mother:

I don't really consider that emotional abuse happens between she and me any longer and that's pretty much because I don't give her the opportunity . . . which limits our relationship. I pretty much know what she can handle and what she can't handle. So the way it's changed is that I am just smarter about my interactions. And I'm no longer grieved about it you know? I used to be really grieved that my mother wasn't who I wanted her to be and that I didn't have that and you know, I just let it go. I found that the great thing about being a mom is that I can be the mom that I wanted my own mom to be. You know, I can make peace with her. She's just who she is and there's no changing that, you know? And there's really no changing our relationship. There is just changing the way I approach our relationship and the expectations that I have of it.

When Lori examined the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors with her mother in mind, she recalled an incident when she felt that her parent's monitoring was inappropriate and excessive:

Yeah and it did go on. Like, yeah, in my twenties. They never wanted me to be independent. I mean they were terrified for me to be a single woman in the world. They wanted me to be with a man. And they were laying in wait to release their parental.....duties to my husband. And I knew that. I mean it was always the unspoken thing.

In my twenties [I] went by myself across the country to Colorado . . . I mean you would have thought I was hitchhiking, you know . . . I had a very well-working car. I had a very well-mapped plan. I had contact points where I was calling them back. I mean, you know, as best I could make it. But they were so

pissed off at me for doing that. They wouldn't speak to me, you know. She would ignore me. And then when I came back and nothing happened she was mad then. I mean you know it was just insane (laughs). I mean you know it was like no congratulations.

I did it to basically prove to myself that I could conquer fear. I went and sat on a mountain for a, a week. Actually I didn't quite make it cause I (laughs) it was horrible! But I took myself backpacking by myself...to twelve thousand feet and was up there for four days before I quit because I was just cold and wet and hungry and couldn't take it anymore. But I did it, you know.....and I felt really empowered by that experience. But then of course I came back down off the mountain and married Kyle. I mean you know what happened. But (laughs) if they could have put me in an insane asylum they probably would have. You know, I mean? (laughs) I was meant to come from California (laughs). . . . I was born in the wrong place. Absolutely!

Significant Relationships

Lori estimated that she had had five major relationships including her second husband Kyle. Her first marriage was to Philip. They were married for 18 months. Lori left when she discovered that Philip was drinking and hiding it from her. She said, "I didn't want to go forward in a relationship with somebody who's obviously an alcoholic." It ended in an amicable divorce. Lori recalled that they, ". . . sat on the steps of the courthouse holding hands and crying on each other's shoulders, you know." They are still in touch.

The time between relationships was always short for Lori, the longest time being four months between her fourth and fifth relationships. She said she, “. . . seem[ed] to jump in.,” and move to the level of commitment stage quickly. She said, “I actually consider myself to have married everyone that I’ve ever (laughs) been with.”

Lori was 30 when she married her second husband Kyle. Their relationship became intense quickly: “. . . [H]e was coming in like the man on the white horse. He asked me to marry him in front of my parents...Yeah! He (sighs) yeah. Three, months into our relationship.” Because they lived in two different states, their relationship was initially long-distance. Lori had not planned to get married so quickly. She and Kyle had talked about living together first and made plans to tell her parents:

And we really, it was a mad love, it was like we see each other across a crowded room. And he’s a very attractive man. And it was just kind of this mad love even though there was a part of me that was holding back. You know, it wasn’t like I was completely committed to him because there was probably something in me that knew, you know? (laughs) I was going to move in with him up here which was pretty insane really that I was leaving everything to come join him, in his domain.

And that’s when we were going to tell my parents. And they [Lori’s parents] had come to [her place in the other state before she was to move in with Kyle] for Thanksgiving, and he came down to meet them. And we were [to] be mature adults and stand there and say, “We’re going to live together. And I’m going to get to know him. And see if I want to marry him.” Well that turned into him asking me to marry him.

Well my sister gave us the big talking to because she knew that's what we were getting ready to do. And their [her parents and sisters] point was, if I was going to give up all this stuff, you know, my job, the house that I was in, you know, all my stuff to move in with this man, that I needed to have more security in this situation, you know. That was their point. Instead of we're going to sell you into slavery (laughs) we're going to lock you into this situation where you won't be able to leave! They want you locked down. So, that's how that went.

Lori regretted that she had allowed herself to be pressured into marrying Kyle rather than living with him as originally planned. She believed this would have made a difference in her choices about the relationship:

Cause seriously, if I had moved in with the man, I would have been out of there. I would not have stayed. He would have done the same thing within a very short period of time the pretend period would have broken down. And I would have seen his true self as soon as we set up shop. But I wouldn't have had the obligation, I wouldn't have gone through the formalization.

There was less than a month between Kyle's popping the question in front of her parents and their wedding. In retrospect, Lori sees the symbolism of that day:

Yeah, we were married on the 21st, [December] *the darkest day of the year!* (says with emphasis) I wanted to be married on the solstice but it wasn't until later that I said, "I was married in the dark!" And I mean it was so cold, like the coldest it's ever been here. (laughs) It was like 19 degrees. *Yes, the universe was really supporting me!* (says with emphasis) "Stop, please!"

During the wedding, Lori was a passive participant with reservations about the marriage:

I can remember going to my wedding which again [pauses and breathes] I was so passive through all of this. It was just rrrhhaa!! I gave it to his [Kyle's] *mother because I didn't really care about it* (says with emphasis). She seemed to be really involved. And I didn't want to go back to the Midwest, I mean I didn't have any real ties there. We had done a friends thing with my friends down there [where she used to live] so I was really complete with that. I mean, but his mother really wanted to have an affair (sighs). So I gave it to her. Just tell me where to be. The only people I knew at my wedding were my parents and my sister.
(laughs)

And I can totally remember being driven to the thing. And I was sitting in between, I mean it was the weirdest thing. My parents were in the front. I guess they had a limo for us. I can't remember. Anyway it was like I was in between my two sisters and my parents were there. And I was just like, "This feels very weird!" And I was just like (laughs). *I felt like an Islamic woman* (says with emphasis). You know, I mean, like it was an arranged marriage or something. I totally, and I, I had visions of just like, I can remember coming to a stop and thinking, "I could just get out right now and (laughs) just go," you know "running down the street and never look back." I mean I really was just having second thoughts cause it was so quick. I mean, you know, it was like too quick.

Even though this was the second marriage for Lori, she felt:

. . . pushed towards marriage. And of course I was thirty and they [her parents] were looking at me like I was . . . (laughs) damaged goods as far as they were concerned, I mean you know? (sighs) But yeah, I think that they were pretty horrified at the way my life was going and they just really felt like I needed to marry and that was going to satisfy a lot of things for them.

Emotional Abuse in Relationships

When asked to describe what she thought someone in an emotionally abusive relationship might be experiencing, Lori said that it meant that,

. . . [T]hey had had gone through a very difficult time in their life. . . . I mean actually, when you just say the words I have like sadness. I have a lot of empathy for the fact that it was probably long arduous experience that took a long time to figure out and work through. You know, not like a quick experience (laughs).

Before the marriage, Lori did not recognize what emotional abuse was:

. . . [W]ell I don't think I understood it at all going into this marriage. I wouldn't have been able to tell you what emotional abuse was. I guess I would have. . . . No, I didn't even understand that there was like, I mean I understood spousal abuse to be physical abuse. Period. End of story. I would not have said that verbal abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse. . . . was a part of the pie. I mean that was such an eye opener to me to realize that that was the very means in which it happened. And how it all fit together. My view of it is that I have a far more working model of (laughs) what it is than I did before.

Of her own experience, she said:

. . . [B]asically life was hell. And life was hell because every moment of the day was another opportunity for something to be wrong. It just was incredibly stressful time. Because, of course, you're trying to make it right, and anticipating what that's going to look like. But also, with an overshadowing that knowing that there's nothing that can be done to make this right. The only thing to make it right is to leave and the realization of that.....depending on what your circumstances are.

My circumstances were that I had a small child and no money of my own. So, it was a very daunting prospect that I knew I was going to head into. So, that pretty much describes it (laughs).

For most of the time she was married to Kyle, Lori did not work outside the home. She was a stay-at-home mom. Towards the end of the marriage Lori began to work as a teacher again.

The behaviors on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that Kyle directed at Lori included: belittling, yelling, name-calling, criticizing her, isolating her from family and friends, attempting to restrict her from resources such as the phone or finances, accusing her of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him, discounting her, negating her feelings or ideas, verbally attacking her, having unrealistic expectations of her, directing dominating behaviors towards her, humiliating her in front of people, saying negative things about her sexually, making excessive sexual demands, ordering her around, ridiculing her, expressing disgust towards her, threatening to abandon her either physically or emotionally, threatening her life or the life of children, pets, or family, involving her in illegal activity, labeling her in a negative way,

driving recklessly to punish or scare her, interrupting her sleeping or eating habits, and blaming her for his problems. Lori also added several additional behaviors. Among these were chasing her in a car or on foot, keeping her from leaving when she wanted to, not allowing doors in the house to be locked or closed for privacy, seeing illness or disability in her as a weakness, placing her in constant double-bind situations, and having no compassion for her. Lori recalled Kyle's reaction to her need for corrective lens or support when she was ill:

He took the fact that I wear eyeglasses as a weakness. You know if you were sick, if you showed any kind of physical malaise there was no, I mean he would not take care of me, when I was sick. He was mean to me. And he would get even meaner because somehow that angered him. He didn't want me to wear glasses. He wanted me to wear contacts. He also had this thing about natural health. I couldn't wear contacts either because those weren't good for me. You know, it was this catch 22. What do you call those? Double-binds. Constant, *constant* (says with emphasis) double-binds.

Oh, I mean he would be a bastard. I mean you know, he would.....(sigh) be yelling at me, you know, that I wasn't really sick or that I was always sick. Get up and take care of the baby, that I was lazy. There was nothing ever to eat. And you know no compassion for illness at all. Illness or physical disability [would] be considered [a] weakness. No compassion.

Of Kyle's emotionally abusive behaviors, Lori was least affected by his sulking.

She described the behaviors that hurt most:

It was more when it was direct attacks on me that hurt the most.....I was going to say criticism I think is probably at the top of the list. And that's because that's what my mother hit on too. Yeah. [looks at the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors]. Negating my feelings and ideas.....and the verbal attacks.....and the sexual remarks, you know, just.....because that just made me feel, I mean, I don't know. That's why when I got out of the relationship I had to prove that he was wrong, you know. That could have really, really hurt me (laughs) even more than it did. The abuse to the pets because that was really scary. I mean it really let me know. And the driving recklessly cause that was scary. I couldn't get in a car with him because I couldn't trust him. And blaming me for his problems.

So.....let's see, all of it! (laughs)

The feelings of dread and regret Lori had at the wedding intensified afterwards:

I was in shock after that because I was completely on his territory. And I just didn't realize what I'd done to myself. I didn't know anybody in this town. And it was all on his turf all his friends. And why the heck I thought I could handle that, I don't know. It was just wacky. But, you know, and that really set me up too, cause I was out of my power-base and I was just really off center. And I was just in shock.

The honeymoon confirmed Lori's fears:

The first fight we had was on our honeymoon when I had set up a situation for him where it was like an act of, of adornment, truthfully. I had set up the massage table. I was going to give him a massage and have him take a hot tub. And I had made him stay out of the room while I was getting it set up. So he was being

impatient or whatever. And he came in and I had him stop at the door cause it was a ceremony that I was doing. And I was stopping him at the door to kind of connect with him and he got so pissed that I'd stopped him at the door. He just crashed through and completely wouldn't cooperate with anything, started immediately accusing me of being a controlling, dominating person and he wasn't going to put up with it. And it was not going to be this way.

And I mean I was horrified! I remember thinking, "Well have I really, have I violated?" you know. "Did I assume something here? I was just really trying to do this for you. And if I did make you wait," you know I remember just being so apologetic thinking I had been assuming too much. But at the same time thinking, "This is just nuts!" You know, "What is the problem, here? You know, you were about to get a massage and all that." . . . That just freaked him out in terms of me being too controlling and he wanted to make sure that I knew where the power started.

And it started right then. Then it was sex on demand. I can remember him saying to me, "It's time." Now this is where, you know, it's just like (laughs and throws up hands). So, I was in shock from the whole, whole thing.

After the honeymoon, Lori wanted out of the marriage but saw no way of doing that easily:

So, I guess I left that whole honeymoon with a good dose of fear of him, you know, realizing I have a crazy person (laughs) on my hands, not reasonable, who's not going to work things out with me. And I can totally remember when we went down the hill . . . as we were driving down the hill just knowing I was in for

it. Knowing that I had really, really dug myself, you know, that I was already in a very serious situation but didn't feel like I could get out even at that point. . . . [I]t was more like saving face kind of thing. I couldn't bear to own up to the fact that I had made a very bad mistake. And cause I just felt like that was going to totally discredit me in the eyes of my family and that they were just never (laughs) going to believe me again when I said, "Oh, look! I have something great going on!" So, there was, there, I was yeah. Within the first week I knew.

Kyle had one set of standards for Lori and a different set of standards for Mia, their daughter. Lori explained:

No, he had a lot of compassion for her. He was completely opposite with her then he is with me. I mean, it was all about her. I was just simply the vehicle that brought her into the world and I was her caretaker. And that was it. But she held up status with him. I really think . . . that there's only one person that he truly loves in this world besides himself and that's her. And I don't think he really counted on that. I think it surprised him that she would move him to such a level of vulnerability. So he held her in high esteem.

Giving the financial management to Kyle was a mistake with severe consequences for Lori:

. . . [T]hat's really what set me up for the whole thing. I never been one to really be financially aggressive, if you will. And when we got married I mean he paid all the bills. And he pretty much had the money.

And I mean I had access to as much money as I needed, or so I thought, as long as it was smooth and going ok (laughs), you know. But that is where I let

myself down *because* (says with emphasis) in relinquishing the control of money over to him and being willing to let him, you know, take care of me *quote-unquote I really set myself up for just being the underdog* (says with emphasis), if you will. And losing a lot of self confidence in my ability to be secure in the world. It added to my fear-base. It added to my low self-esteem when that became really the next issue to deal with. And he knew what he was doing, in that context. But I was more than willing to let him take over the financial reigns. And of course he drove it right down into a hole. You know, I mean [Kyle] inherited \$250,000 shortly after the baby was born which was just a year and a half in to our marriage. So, you know, it all looked really great. But, it's gone. You know, he has basically run through it.

Lori did not label what she was experiencing as emotional abuse until four years into the marriage. The incident that brought a change in her perception was a "physical assault." Lori explained:

(sighs) When he inherited this money and that's when he really went nuts. He locked himself up in a room with however as much hashish as he could get his hands on, smoked himself green, literally, and was doing day-trading. And so he was very volatile, lots of highs, lots of lows. He was probably drinking too, but he's always hidden that very cleverly, you know, but the smoking was always very obvious. There were daily fights that went on, *daily* (says with emphasis). He was under my foot. I had a new baby and this husband that was also in the house 24-7.

We needed to get into a bigger house. So I was really pushing for us to move and so that was my big drive to look for a house. We'd been house-hunting and he wanted to get out into the country and build a house. I thought that was ridiculous because.....I didn't want to be isolated like that, number one. I knew that I was going to go back to work at some point and that she would be in school. I mean there were just so many logistical things about it that were just nuts. So he pretended to be looking for houses with me, but really his whole thing was building a house in the country which he was slowly.....planning. I went away to visit my folks. He bought the land while I was gone. And I came back and he informed me that he had bought this land and that he was moving up there (laughs) in a school bus and a teepee. And we were going to live like Daniel Boone. So at this point *I truly knew he was insane* (says with emphasis), you know. And.....he kept saying, "This is what we're going." And I kept saying, "No, this is not what we're going to do. We're not going. You can go. But we're not going."

So, the fight happened because he picked up the baby and he took off and he was leaving with the baby. And I went nuts. And I tried to grab the baby back from him. And he wouldn't let me have the baby. And that's when I punched him like in the chest or something [points with her hand to the middle of her upper chest] like right there, to try and get him to let go of the baby. And he hauled off and wacked me in the face. And, you know, when I recovered from that then I latched on to his arm with a monkey bite and I wasn't going to let go.

And so he did give me the baby (laughs) and when he gave me the baby I split, I mean literally. I was in the car and gone. And we split at that point. And he went and did that. He went and moved out to the country. And I moved in with a friend and proceeded to go to spousal abuse sessions. That's where I really got educated that I was in a full-blown abusive relationship. I was completely interacting in spousal abuse and I had been terribly affected by this and had a lot of trauma to recover from.

And I went to see a lawyer to proceed during this. He had drained the bank accounts so I had no money. My options were to move back in with my parents and put my child care in day care and go to work. Again, I went to see a lawyer and, you know, got the ducks in a row. Or to go back into the marriage, get him to build a house, sue him for half of the value of the house that was built and try to make a life. And I choose plan B (laughs) very, very, very deliberately, knowing that when I moved out into the country that he was isolating me and all of that stuff. And I still educated myself about what was the trigger. The trigger was that I touched him. So I knew how to avoid physical abuse with him. I started squirreling away money for myself.

You know, it was very, very deliberate. That was it for me. I knew that this was over and I had to be smart about how I got myself out of it. In hindsight, I think I should have gone to my parents (laughs) you know, that probably would have been the better choice. Again, I didn't want to face that I had, I mean, you know, it was just such a shocking thing to go, "I am in spousal abuse!" I mean it's, there's so much shame! So much shame. So I had too much pride to really

turn tail and run and so I went back in, you know, with new gloves and new attitude and I did it. (laughs) *It took four years!* (says with emphasis) . . . [T]o accomplish that and it got really, really bad because I mean, you know, he just got more and more terrorizing.

Then he started threatening to, his threats to hurt me were so subtle. I mean you know, or to even kill me. He never threatened to kill Mia but he definitely threatened to kill me with phrases like, oh gosh, he would talk like in riddles you know or.....like use astrological symbology. Knowing that my sun's in Aquarius, he would say, "Aquarius is setting today." There was nothing that you could say was an overt like I'm going to kill you. He didn't say that. But he would say, "You're dying out of my life." I remember that. "*You are dying out of my life* (says with emphasis). As far as I'm concerned you're dead." You know, this type thing...[H]e meant them as death threats, I do believe that he did. But I certainly took them as that. They had that effect on me. And I was scared of him. Scared of him. And of course he continued on with his drug abuse. And the reason I finally left, I wasn't really completely ready to leave, the house wasn't completely finished but he was starting to deal in drugs. And I just said . . . *forget it* (says with emphasis). Plus there were the women. It was just getting sick, sicker and sicker and sicker. And I just had an opportunity to do some house sitting for somebody and really he didn't know where I was and it wasn't really that I planned to leave then. But I came into town and was going to house sit. He knew I was going to go house sit. But I didn't tell him where I was. And [I] had the baby with me and of course, [who] at this point was four.

And I woke up in that house for the first time realizing he didn't know where I was. And I had slept so great that night. And I mean seriously, it had been the first night's sleep that I had had where I felt safe. And so I reconnected with that feeling of safety and realized what it had cost me to do the Plan B (laughs), you know. And I just knew I wasn't going back. So I started making plans that day on how not to go back. And it was pretty ragged, I mean, you know. It was pretty ragged how I got out of there. But I did it.

It was just such a stress (laughs) on my mental and emotional body that it was really hard to think clearly about what the next step should be, you know. I certainly, I don't think I could have even had a conversation with you like this where, you know, I was linear in any fashion whatsoever cause I was fried.

Lori has come to believe that Kyle is bipolar. She is not aware that he has ever been diagnosed or gotten treatment. She also believed Kyle had a drug and alcohol problem:

He won't even recognize it in himself because he's got this thing about perfection. And of course that would mean illness, that would mean weakness. *Can't have that!* (says with emphasis) (laughs) . . . Although he has admitted [that] he was drinking too much to his mother. So that was like the first that he's ever admitted he was doing something that was not perfect. But you know, I found that kind of interesting. (sigh)

Although Kyle's mother was somewhat supportive of Lori both during and after their marriage, she had her limits. Lori said:

. . . [B]ut she wouldn't, when things got really bad she also wouldn't go to court to say, "She [Lori] needs full custody." You know, I asked her and no she wouldn't do that because she's scared of him. She knew that he would make her life hell. And that is the biggest red flag ever. If a man does not treat his mother with absolute reverence.....don't go near him. (laughs) I mean seriously! Because [it is] at exactly the meter in which you can tell what they think about women and what they are thinking about you.

Kyle does not believe that he did anything wrong in the marriage. He argues that both of them were victims. Lori said:

I mean he hasn't done any sort of like true self-[reflection]. He lost all of his friends. He's completely isolated at this point. One of his best friends and his wife who he knew from earlier in his life, that friend died which was very sad. Because that was the person he respected on earth. But then he was still friends with his wife. And a very short time after the funeral, and this was while Kyle and I were still married, he went and propositioned the widow. And of course [it] just freaked her out completely. It was such an incredibly self-sabotaging behavior.

So he still carries around, drags around this cross behind him. "Oh, you know, why did I do that, that was so." It's not even really why did I do that. It was that....."because of what happened she won't talk to me." . . . I said, "You could probably mend that relationship if you just went and admitted wrong-doing and really promised that [it] wouldn't happen again. Kyle, you don't have any friends left. So if you wanted to re-establish friends then you need to own what you did to hurt them and promise that it won't happen again and then re-build trust with

them. And I think that you could re-establish some of these friendships that you have slaughtered.” And he went back over there this weekend to her.

He really thinks that I have victimized him in some way. And I really don't understand how that is. So I just find that interesting.

Because of Mia, Lori still has some contact with Kyle. Even this minimal contact is difficult:

. . . [B]ut yes it was always just kind of wait and see how the weekend went [when Kyle takes Mia] because sometimes it would be good and sometimes it wouldn't. It was almost like I had to go into a state of amnesia. I really couldn't think about it. Because there wasn't anything I could do about it. I explored that completely but truthfully when Mia goes off with him, you just have to sit and wait. Until he brings Mia back.

And so I would distract myself. I would go into Atlanta and do social things. And I'd just, you know, but I'm very nervous when Sunday night would come and 7:00 was there and at 6:30 I would be.....pacing the floor, just to, you know, anticipate that is he going to show up? Is he not going to show up with her? Was she going to have a horrible story to tell me when she got home? So, It's hard. So, I'm really grateful for this time frame right now where it's kind of relaxed. It's just amazing to be so grateful for normalcy (laughs). *Oh, gosh, wow this is no drama!* (says with emphasis). It's just like such a gift. And.....I will never take it for granted again (laughs), *ever* (says with emphasis)!

Because things are unpredictable with Kyle, it is difficult for Lori to feel comfortable about his taking Mia for visitation. She described how this tends to go for her:

When he finally took Mia, I still always go through this thing, if I'll ever see our child again because I always wonder if he's just going to have this *psychotic break* (says with emphasis), you know, or whatever. Because you know, anytime a person is.....not (laughs) really together you.....it's very difficult to turn your child over to them. It's very frightening. I mean it is the child's father at least it's not a stranger piece to it. And, then I mean Mia has my number. She, I mean I always you know, have always had her.....memorize phone numbers and have taught her how to use the phone. And we talk about using pay phones. I mean you know, that's the things that I've done for her. I mean which is just good anyway. I mean you know, anytime Mia needs to so she can try to work [her] way back if she needed to. [She] has some skills to do that.

But I was just exhausted. I couldn't get out of bed the next day. They left the night before. And the next day I tried to get up. *And I, I couldn't believe it, it was like I had been hit by a truck* (says with emphasis). And I realized, this is like how it is when it's good! You know? You know? I mean the amount of energy, this is as good as it gets (laughs). But a lot of it was just.....because I'm so on guard, you know.

Lori talked about how gender roles have had an impact on how men and women relate in relationships. She wondered if she might have better understood how to interact with men if she had had brothers:

I mean I was raised with all girls. So I didn't really ever see how a guy interacted with parents or how a mother interacted with a guy. It would have been really interesting to see, you know, really. But you know, my dad was.....the king of the house, even though he was a good man. I mean he was not you know, rude to us. He didn't take advantage of it. But sure enough I mean you know, he sat at the head of the table. You didn't even dare think about sitting at the head of the table. But that's ok. But it just sort of set us up for this.....you know if a guy asks, then you have to, you know, there's sort of an obligatory feeling that they deserve it or something.

Lori had conventional attitudes toward gender. She believed that the difficulty in her own and male-female relationships generally was rooted in a tendency to reject conventional ideology:

. . . [B]ut I do think there are inherent natures in both men and women you know. I think that what we've lost, well we'll get back to it. But there had to be a balancing that came out of it.....but it's like where I got set up for it was that I'm really very receptive person and I'm a passive person. And I would not chose to be the owner of my own business. As I was saying, money's not my forte. It's not really in my nature. Do you see?

I have the much more softer aspect and that never bothered me. I mean I still felt perfectly equal. I didn't feel weaker or lesser than. I supported feminism but at the same time I didn't support feminism in that women couldn't be women, meaning true to their natures which is more receptive and softer. And that was fine for me. I loved the idea of staying home with my child and being a mother. I

didn't have any problem with that whatsoever. As a method of self-expression it wasn't demeaning to me.

And I was fine to let him take the role of keeping tigers from the door, dealing with the money, being the head of the household. But he had no code of honor! (laughs) He lied and cheated and switched the rules to suit his own needs. You need a man with a strong code of honor if you're going to let him do (laughs) that. Because that's where he got me was that he had me in kind of a prison. And then he turned on me and which made me angry at my own nature. It made me feel like I had done something wrong by wanting to be a stay-at-home mom, you see. And then it all gets twisted like.

Perception of Self

Emotional abuse had a significant impact on Lori. She felt isolated and ashamed: Oh, well I felt.....gosh.....shame is the first thing that comes, that comes to mind. You've heard it from other people too. It's just that it's such an amazing thing when you find yourself in.....a relationship that is so destructive. I mean I could not even, I was just like, how did I get here? How in the world did I let this happen to me? And so.....there was a lot of shame around it.

I think it definitely affected my self-image tremendously. And I really wanted to know why and how I had let this happen. So I really did start focusing. On one hand I think it made me really delve into my.....personality weaknesses more so than I would have if I would have had this happy go-lucky relationship that was all perfect. I think I'm a much more introspective person. I think I'm a much more careful person about relationships and who I'll let into my life. I mean

I can totally smell it. I deflect it. When I can sense that somebody's really off, Mmhm [No] they're not coming in, you know, at all. (sighs) But how it affected me? At first it affected me incredibly negatively but then as I began to work with it, I was able to turn it around to a more positive reflection.

I don't have the shame today about it. I can have anger about it especially when I talk to somebody about it and they want to say, "Oh it wasn't that bad," or you know "He's a really nice guy," or you know. I mean things like that. I still have that feeling of alienation because I know that they just don't know. And while I used to have sort of a drive to prove them wrong or make them understand I don't have that any more because I know I'm just not going to get that satisfaction of really having them understand what that was like.

When Lori left the marriage, she felt emotionally unstable:

I would have to say when I got out of that relationship with Kyle, when I first left, it was just kind of imploding and getting worse. And, I'm trying to remember back . . . I was talking with girlfriends, and they were like you've got to leave. So I was getting a lot of encouragement just to get out.

And when I finally did I would have to say I probably was certifiably insane. I mean you know, I was just.....I was scared first. I was terrified of being alone and on my own. I had *a frenetic energy about me* (says with emphasis). For one thing I was really scared about being able to make a living. For another thing Kyle got even more violent and crazy when I left because that was always his thing, you know. And I'd had enough education about the process of abuse to know that that was the most dangerous time-frame. So that was frightening to me.

But the other thing was that I felt very sexually repressed because I had been.....you know.....everything about me had been criticized and so I basically kind of went about proving that I was still a sexually desirable person. So I went a little wild.

And Marshall, [a new boyfriend who came after Lori's divorce] I was so grateful that the universe sent me Marshall because he truly was not that person at all. So it had an impact in that I was just really.....(sighs).....just ready to see, I guess I just kind of, I wanted to have a lot of different experiences. He was the very quiet voice of reason. But never said no, when I wanted to go to a club or something you know. He just wanted me to be safe.

And I was probably not really caring about my safety. I would have to say I just wasn't really thinking clearly. It lasted about six months before.....like I came back to myself and went, *wait a minute* (says with emphasis). I'm a mother! (laughs) . . . I mean I sort of.....was on the edge of a lot of things. I never really entered into major deviant behavior. Although I kind of stood on the edge and looked in (laughs).

Lori explained:

Like there's this club in a city I traveled to. There were S & M type things going on and that was intriguing for me. And it was because *I had so much damn anger that it really looked good to me to beat a man* (says with emphasis) (laughs) with one of those (mimics hitting). It was like *yeah! Why not* (says with emphasis)! And so I kind of had to move through that period of just recovering power for myself. And then I went oh, wait a minute. That's stuff off the base. That's not

healthy behavior. We need to restructure this. That's not who I want to be, you know. So it had an impact in that way.

And like I said, thank goodness, whatever guardian angel I had that led me to Marshall. . . . [H]e was like the anti-thesis of Kyle, seriously. He couldn't be anymore opposite (laughs) of him. . . . I was obviously not a healthy person when he got with me. I had a lot to work out. And I could have easily gotten back involved with something even crazier because I certainly wasn't making good decisions. But there was something that, you know, some sort of grace that surrounded me that allowed me to go ahead and try to make bad choices but still not get myself into that deep of trouble. So you know, that was interesting.

After the marriage ended, Lori took awhile for old fears to go away. To assist with this she explored different belief systems:

I'm sure there was some part of me that perceived myself as like damaged goods. I mean actually it was very shocking to realize that I was still a mom and I had to do all of that stuff. So I wasn't really a single person. It wasn't like you went back. . . . to before the marriage started. Which that was kind of shocking to me, you know, to realize that I was really in a different place in my life now then I was when I first got together with him *and* (says with emphasis) that there wasn't going to be any really getting away from him. I was going to have to work this thing out somehow.

I was living in fear, waking up scared to death. It really started me on my spiritual quest. Of course I've always been on a spiritual quest . . . I was going into like the New Age genre but more I was trying to figure out what was going to

happen in the future type-thing. And those scenarios that I was finding in the new age were not all good. There's a lot of dramatic stuff which only increased my fear (sighs and laughs). You know it was ridiculous!

The process of claiming a spiritual identity and psychological recovery has been a long one that continues for Lori:

It was really great just to be able to just release it. And it took awhile because it was such, it was a real restructuring. And I had one of those great ego tistical fall-aways that they talk about you know where (laughs) it was like, the personality was still like, "Oh but you know, you gotta, how do you know?" I mean it was like the personality wanted to hang on. It was almost like gripping at straws kind of thing. But yet, there was a calmness in me as things like.....I just knew that when I let go, that I was being moved in a direction that I didn't have control over but yet I was going to be ok.

And things happened like my landlord called and told me they were raising the rent and so I immediately had to move. My car broke down and I needed to get another car. I mean like I said, the personality was freaking out because the external things that looked like safety, it all started to fall away. I could have really gotten scared then (laughs). You know, it's like Chicken Little, here it is! But I knew that that would be the process.

But there was just this peace inside of me. And when I would get afraid then I would move into the meditation and just go back into that place of faith. Where it was just releasing to the fact that I knew there was a higher power that was guiding me and I was going to be ok.

If I made it through that horrible marriage, I was going to survive the aftermath? (laughs) So that was the peace. Well I mean I'm still working on it. I'm not done (laughs) by any means. I perceive myself now to be a person of great strength, actually. I have a lot of trust in myself that I'm going to be able to figure it out and work it out. I'm going to be able to have the patience and the tact to.....just stay the course.....until it gets worked out.

I recognize myself still having a lot of immaturity, especially in how I deal with money. . . . For some reason I have a real.....block with that. So that's a weak point in my character that I'm trying to shore up and get over whatever I have about dealing with money effectively. And being just responsible. I mean you know, it's not that I go into stores and overspend. But at the same time I don't budget and have a plan. I don't have any insurance for example. I don't have any retirement plan. So that's how I'm saying I'm being irresponsible with money. It's not that I'm out of control with my spending. But I need to be more.....together with it. And just have a more solid plan in that way. So I recognize that there have been places in me that are still stuck in adolescence that didn't sort of move forward with the rest of me. So I feel like I'm going back and retrieving those spots now. And saying, "Ok, come on! (laughs) *We're forty. Move forward* (says with emphasis)!" So I have a lot more trust in myself now (laughs).

The rage and anger the relationship stirred within Lori surprised her:

. . . [W]hen I entered the marriage with him I was a vegetarian pacifist (laughs). I mean you know? I considered myself to be really, almost like a flower child. I left

it [the marriage] willing to commit murder and participate in S & M (laughs). Not really. I would not have committed murder actually. But I mean it. I had told him, thank you! I had got[ten] in touch with my denied rage.

It was really strong denied rage that I had that I didn't believe that I had, that I was capable of those types of emotions. I guess they really scared me because I thought I would lose control. And I didn't. I mean yes, if you push me far enough I can...lose control but I won't go as far as to commit murder. But I'll fight back, you know, defend myself. But I won't premeditate somebody's murder and actually carry it out. I may fantasize about them getting hurt in some way so that I can go up to them and tell them what I think (laughs) cause I want atonement.

I can actually look at him now and say you were a great teacher for me to understand about rage and about rage inside myself and what that looks like. And I can also now use that rage to move myself forward. [inhales] I'd have to say that it was anger.....that finally put the fire under my butt to get out it. So, on the one hand having a weird relationship with anger but on the other hand, I also know that it's a strength. It can really motivate you because it moves so fast. You know, it's a very quick energy. I can definitely say that I've learned about rage. I do have rage (laughs). And that I can manage it. It's not something that's bigger than me. But it's definitely something that is my own. And that it's ok to have that, you know. And I'm not going to hurt anybody because I have it. But.....it's a natural human reaction to.....just the craziness of our world. It's the little things that happen to you as you grow up.

Lori spoke of what she learned about herself as a result of this experience:

. . . [M]y courage, that's what pops into my mind. I didn't even know I had courage. An incredible strong code of honor that I have.....that.....you know, where I knew right from wrong. And not allowing that to continue for my child. So that went back to my code of honor. I couldn't not stay present. If my child hadn't been there I may, well I don't know, I don't think I would have actually. But the child was such a motivator for me because.....her being a witness to what was going on was more than I could stand. And so that's what really drove me to get out of it. Because I wanted the buck to stop with me and I wanted to make a difference. I did not want her to think this was.....how men and women related. So just a really strong code of honor that said what honor was what really made the difference.

I've learned that I'm fallible (laughs) that I can make mistakes. And that I can make bad choices for myself that can have incredibly long-lasting effects (laughs). I mean you know, yes I don't think I thought I was a perfect person by any means. But I didn't realize what a mess you could make of a life. And that it would have such, I mean you know I never realized that I could create the kind of grief that I've created for myself by simply just rushing things. And not really taking my time *to trust that I was ok in this situation* (says with emphasis). And so, I really think that that's the biggest piece now is that I.....I love myself.....a lot more. And I don't think, I didn't even know that I didn't love myself, you know, that there was even a willingness to just kind of throw myself to the wind and hope for the best. I'm just more cautious now in terms of not allowing myself

to be put in a situation that's going to cause me such grief or my child grief. That it [the grief] will be lasting for years (laughs) like that. The spiritual values of Buddhism.

And forgiving. I mean really. And *forgetting to a certain degree* (says with emphasis). Forgetting doesn't mean that you haven't learned. It certainly means that when you see them again, you remember (laughs). But it's not like it's obsessively rolling in my brain anymore. You know, thinking about.....the stuff that happens. And forgiving is more.....it's definitely for yourself. Forgiving him does not give him absolution for anything that he did. And it gives me everything in terms of forgiving myself for letting it happen you know. And for allowing that to go [on]. And being gentle with myself.

I didn't have revengeful things either. I didn't want to get him back, you know. I just kind of wanted to get past it and move on. I didn't want him to suffer. So it was a tremendous learning process about myself, you know, as we've been talking about. Just kind of not realizing that I was capable of doing things that I now know that I'm capable of. And also realizing that I'm not capable of doing certain things either. Like I'm not capable of living with long-time abuse, you know. That I really have (laughs) more self-esteem than that. And that I will.....move past it. And I wouldn't allow it to go on. And that makes me feel good about myself, you know, in that you know I pulled out of it. Finding that spiritual faith that you can tune into that has really strong, you know, moral values attached to it that you can tune in to that helps you understand and gives meaning to what you experienced. But ultimately you have to go to forgiveness so that you

can create something new. Otherwise you're stuck in the past. No, it [forgiveness] has nothing to do with him (laughs).

. . . [I]t relieved me from having the need to have.....atonement. I knew that the universe or higher powers or whatever, he's going to get it, you know? He will be held accountable for every rotten thing that he has ever done and I don't have to do a thing to make that happen. All I have to do is go on and be the best person I can be. And make a good life for myself and my child and in that way, you know, living well is the best revenge (laughs).

Lori has found exercise and humor to be very important allies:

But for the type of depression I had...I think I really just need to learn to manage it and work with it. I'm still learning to manage it. One of the things, like physical exercise I know will help me manage it but getting the discipline to do it everyday is still something I'm working on.

I got really depressed at one point, really sad. And I was having perpetual suicide thoughts even though I knew I wasn't going to do it *because I definitely am not leaving my child to him* (says with emphasis)! (laughs) I wasn't going to do that. But yet I was *I was just depressed you know* (says with emphasis). And feeling sorry for myself, having a lot of self-pity.

And I got the advice to start getting some humor. Like when I was in one of these really funky moods that I needed to go rent a funny movie or I needed to, you know, listen to a comic or read a funny book. But I needed humor and I needed it fast! So I do. I have a lot of things that make me laugh you know, life

Far Side cartoon books and just funny movies, comics. I love Robin Williams. I love Whoopi Goldberg and just tune into them! And just start laughing.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This section provides a critical discussion of the findings and is organized around eight major themes. Among these are: types and prevalence of abuse, awareness of emotional abuse, turning points and epiphanies, symptomology, emotional abuse and the family of origin, emotional abuse as a relational pattern, the role of support networks, and the healing process. In the discussion of these themes, the research questions that guided this study will be addressed. Those questions are:

1. How do women describe and assign meaning to their history, perception, and experience of emotional abuse?
2. What factors are associated with women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships?
3. What factors are associated with women's exit and recovery from emotionally abusive relationships?

Research Question I

The purpose of research question one was to explore how women described and assigned meaning to their history, perception, and experience of emotional abuse. Several themes emerged from the narratives that shed light on this question. These themes had to do with the types and prevalence of abuse, women's awareness of emotional abuse, turning points and epiphanies, and symptomology.

Types and Prevalence of Emotional Abuse

The prevalence of emotional abuse has been difficult to determine. Most studies of this phenomenon have been done on young, heterosexual college-age populations rather than people over 30 who are in marital or cohabiting relationships (Clark, et. al., 1995; Kelly & DeKeserky, 1994; Pipes and LeBov-Keeler, 1997). Even when investigators have used diverse samples (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994; Patrick-Hoffman 1982, 1984), little attention has been given to the prevalence of emotional abuse. The current study departs from the majority of previous research on emotional abuse, in that the sample was comprised of women who are beyond college-age. Also specific attention was devoted to the types and prevalence of emotional abuse.

The women in this study were asked to identify the types of emotional abuse they experienced using a Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that was adapted from several researchers' definitions of emotional abuse (see Appendix G). This Checklist contained 36 items. Table 3 shows participants and the types of abuse they experienced. The number of emotionally abusive behaviors experienced by the women was between 19 and 33. Vicki (see Appendix K) reported a high of 33 or 89% of the behaviors on the Checklist. Mary (see Appendix J) and Lori (see Appendix N) experienced 26 or 72% of the behaviors on the Checklist. Becka (see Appendix M) experienced 24 or 67% of the behaviors listed. Jordan (see Appendix L) experienced 23 or 64% of the behaviors listed. Alice (see Appendix P) experienced 20 or 56% of the behaviors listed. Finally, Eliza (see Appendix O) experienced 19 or 53% of the emotionally abusive behaviors on the Checklist.

Table 3

Types of Emotional Abuse Experienced by the Participants

Types of emotional abuse	Mary	Alice	Vicki	Eliza	Becka	Jordan	Lori
Belittles you	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Yells at you	X	X	X		X	X	X
Calls you names	X	X	X			X	X
Criticizes you	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Isolates you from family and friends	X		X	X	X		X
Monitors your time and activities	X		X	X		X	
Attempts to restrict resources such as phone or finances	X		X	X	X		X
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	X		X		X		
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him		X	X		X		X
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	X		X	X		X	
Discounts you	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	X	X		X	X	X	X
Verbally attacks you	X	X	X		X	X	X
Has unrealistic expectations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X		X	X	X	X	X
Humiliates you in front of people			X		X	X	X
Says negative things about you sexually		X	X	X			X
Makes excessive sexual demands	X		X	X	X	X	X
Orders you around	X		X		X	X	X
Sulks	X	X	X	X	X		
Withholds affection	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Ignores you	X	X	X		X	X	
Slams objects or doors		X	X			X	
Ridicules you		X	X			X	X

Table 3

Types of Emotional Abuse Experienced by the Participants (continued)

Types of emotional abuse	Mary	Alice	Vicki	Eliza	Becka	Jordan	Loxri
Expresses disgust towards you	x				x		x
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	x	x	x	x		x	x
Expresses excessive jealousy	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets or family		x					x
Threatens your property			x				
Abuses your children, pets, or parents			x				x
Involves you in illegal activity							x
Labels you in a negative way	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	x		x		x		x
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	x		x	x	x	x	x
Withholds sex			x			x	
Blames you for his problems	x	x	x	x	x		x

Table 4 illustrates the prevalence of abuse by type. All or 100% of the women were belittled, criticized, discounted, labeled in a negative way, and had partners with unrealistic expectations of them. Six or 88% of the women were yelled at, had their feelings negated, were verbally attacked, had dominating behaviors directed at them, had excessive sexual demands made of them, had affection withheld from them, were threatened with abandonment either physically or emotionally, had excessive jealousy expressed by their partners, had their sleeping or eating habits interrupted, and were blamed for their partners' problems. Five or 71% of the women were called names, isolated from family and friends, had restrictions placed or attempted on resources (e.g., telephone or finances), were ordered around, were ignored, and had partners who sulked. Four or 57% of the women were accused of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at their partners, had their time and activities monitored, had objects thrown (not necessarily at the woman), were humiliated in front of people, were ridiculed, had negative things said about them sexually, and had partners drive recklessly to punish or scare them.

Three or 43% of the women had partners interfere with opportunities (e.g., job, medical care, education), slam objects or doors, and express disgust towards them. Two or 29% of the women had partners threaten their life; the life of their children, pets or family; abuse their children, pets or parents; and withhold sex. One or 14% of the women had partners threaten their property and involve them in illegal activity.

Three of the women--Alice, Becka, and Lori--made additions to the Checklist. Alice added that her partner "did things to make her jealous." Becka added "interrupted her reading." Lori added "chasing her in a car or on foot," "not allowing her to leave a

Table 4

Percentage of Women Experiencing Type of Abuse

Types of emotional abuse	Percentage and number of women who experienced behaviors						
	A 100% (7)	B 88% (6)	C 71% (5)	D 57% (4)	E 43% (3)	F 29% (2)	G 14% (1)
Belittles you	x						
Criticizes you	x						
Discounts you	x						
Has unrealistic expectations	x						
Labels you in a negative way	x						
Yells at you		x					
Negates your feelings or ideas		x					
Verbally attacks you		x					
Directs dominating behaviors towards you		x					
Makes excessive sexual demands		x					
Withholds affection		x					
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally		x					
Expresses excessive jealousy		x					
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits		x					
Blames you for his problems		x					
Calls you names			x				
Isolates you from family and friends			x				
Attempts to restrict resources such as phone or finances			x				
Orders you around			x				
Sulks			x				
Ignores you			x				
Monitors your time and activities				x			
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him				x			
Throws objects, not necessarily at you				x			
Humiliates you in front of people				x			
Says negative things about you sexually				x			
Ridicules you				x			
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you				x			
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)					x		
Slams objects or doors					x		
Expresses disgust towards you					x		
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets or family						x	
Abuses your children, pets or parents						x	
Withholds sex						x	
Threatens your property							x
Involves you in illegal activity							x

room or house,” “not allowing doors, if there were doors, in the house to be closed or locked for privacy,” “placing her in double-binds situations,” “treating illness or physical disability as a weakness,” and “having no compassion for her.”

There are many ways of thinking about the clusters of emotionally abusive behaviors the woman identified. For example, if we consider the work done by Tolman (1989) on the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI), most of the items from the emotional-verbal sub-scale appear in the three most prevalent clusters of emotionally abusive behaviors reported by the women in this study (see columns A-G of Table 4).

Fifty-seven percent or four women in this study experienced behaviors that bordered on physical abuse. For example, four women’s partners threw objects but not necessarily at them. Four women’s partners drove recklessly to punish or scare them. Two women’s partner’s threatened their lives, the life of a child, and abused the women’s pets.

Loring (1994) divided emotional abuse into overt and covert emotional abuse. Both are damaging but covert abuse may have the greatest impact because of what it does to women’s perception of self. Loring (1994) explained:

Because they are often unaware of its essential violence, victims commonly react to covert abuse with feelings of despair and confusion. This kind of abuse consists of an insidious, sometimes complex pattern of negative feedback. . . . Any consistent empathy for the partner’s feelings [by the abuser] are precluded. By discounting her needs and feelings, he tells her, implicitly, how unimportant they are to him. Among emotional abuse victims, this constant and subtle discounting

of their feelings contributes to a profound sense of loneliness and sadness. . . . The impact of this depiction of one's feelings as unreal is powerful. The victim begins to internalize the negation and to feel herself eroding away. Over time these covert mechanisms of labeling, discounting, and negation lead to a diminution and destruction of the self. Victims describe feeling that the constituent parts of the self--the individual characteristics, abilities and skills, preferences and wishes, dreams and aspirations--no longer cohere. This fragmentation affects the victim's thinking and judgment. (p. 3-6)

Four of the six items Loring (1994) identified as covert abuse were included on the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors. These were discounting, labeling in a negative way, negating the woman's feelings, and threatening to abandon the woman either physically or emotionally.

All of the women in this study experienced two forms of covert abuse. They were discounted and labeled in a negative way. Six women experienced other forms of covert abuse. Their feelings or ideas were negated and their partners threatened to physically or emotionally abandon them.

In the process of completing the Checklist, some of the women "discovered" abuse they had not been aware of before. Eliza was surprised to find that excessive jealousy was a form of emotional abuse. She said, "(sighs) I just never had personally identified that as having been abusive--it makes sense to me but, I just never identified it." Jordan commented that she had not realized, until interviewed, how much Jeff dominated her thoughts, "I thought about him all the time. Is this going to make him happy? If I do this, is it going to bother him?"

As they examined the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors, several women came to view their relationships in a different light. For example, Becka commented:

I'm having trouble with "attempt to restrict resources such as finances?" To this day I don't know if it was intentional on his part. . . . He always paid for everything when we went shopping together but I don't ever really remember it being a problem when we were together. Retrospectively I thought, that's really weird. I never had the sense while I was with him that he was doing that.

When asked what emotionally abusive behaviors had the greatest impact on them, most said that criticism was the most hurtful. Mary cited Michael's constant disapproval-non-verbal and verbal. Vicki mentioned Donny's verbal attacks. Jordan identified Jeff's control:

. . . everything being on his terms. His questioning of me and telling me this is what you're going to do or this is what you can't do. Expecting me to always be there for him, for whatever he wanted to do. Basically letting him use me however he wanted and the way that made me be uptight and closed off from other people. Becka was most affected by Gregg's accusations that she did not care about him.

Whereas, Lori had difficulty identifying the type of abuse that had the most impact on her:

I was going to say criticism I think is probably at the top of the Checklist. And that's because that's what my mother hit on too. [examines Checklist] Negating my feelings and ideas, the verbal attacks, and the sexual remarks because that just made me feel, I mean, I don't know. That's why when I got out of the relationship

I had to prove that he was wrong. That could have really, really hurt me (laughs) even more than it did. The abuse to the pets because that was really scary. And, and the driving recklessly cause that was scary. I couldn't get in a car with him because I couldn't trust him. And blaming me for his problems. So, let's see. All of it (laughs).

Eliza was most affected by Colin's efforts to change her appearance and behavior. Alice was hurt by Elliot's constant criticism: "It was the criticism more than anything else, that I couldn't be enough. I wasn't going to be enough. Criticizing about my weight [that was] probably the most painful."

Although this study focused on emotional abuse, some of the behaviors suggested a potential for physical abuse. Three of the women had their lives threatened. Eliza recognized the danger when she decided to leave Colin:

When I decided to move out he threw something. Once. That's it. It scared me. You know, I actually was really.....pretty paranoid. I was very careful for the first few months that I wasn't living with Colin. I think especially after, yeah, especially after we decided to get divorced. So sometimes I would drive around my block before I would actually went into my driveway. Stuff like that. Cause I knew he knew where I lived and, and I sometimes thought that maybe he would actually come after me, physically. But he never did. But I think that him actually throwing that thing, you know that was the most physical he had ever gotten. I think that's part of what made me think that he might actually come after me.

Colin's gun purchase added to Eliza's anxiety, ". . . [K]nowing that he had a gun made me more afraid of a, of an attack by him. Cause I think I had an easier time picturing him shooting me than physically beating me up."

Elliot threatened violence and Alice took him seriously:

When I was pregnant, I was seven months pregnant, and we had just come back from Disney World. He took me there for mother's day weekend. And I don't know if he had been using [illicit drugs] that particular day or what. But he called and he just told me to look out that I'm going to be sorry I ever met him and da da da da da and get a restraining order. And I did.

Lori's ex-husband, Kyle, veiled his threats but they were no less frightening:

. . . [H]e just got more and more terrorizing. . . . [H]e definitely threatened to kill me with phrases like, what I mean he would talk in riddles you know or. . . . use astrological symbology, knowing that my sun's in Aquarius, he would say, "Aquarius is setting today." . . . I mean there was nothing that you could say was overt, like I'm going to kill you. He didn't say that. But he would say, "You're dying out of my life." I remember that. "You are dying *out of my life* (says with emphasis). As far as I'm concerned you're dead." You know, this type thing. . . . He meant them as death threats, I do believe that he did. I certainly took them as that. They had that effect on me. I was scared of him. Scared of him.

There is no clear indication from previous research that a threat of violence is necessarily a step towards physical abuse. On the other hand, a threat of physical violence is understandably disturbing to women. Bowlby (1977) identified that the threat of suicide by a parent during the important period of development of attachment in a child's

life can result in that child developing an anxious attachment style. It could therefore, be reasoned that a partner threatening a woman's life, if she tends towards an anxious attachment style, may result in the woman clinging to the partner rather than pulling away (Loring, 1994; O'Hearn & Davis, 1997).

Another complicating dynamic had to do with the women's partner's inconsistent expression of kindness. Loring (1994) and Raymond and Brushi (1989) identified this dynamic as a factor that clouded the women's view of emotionally abusive relationships. Loring (1994) explained:

The emotionally abused child--and, later the same child as an emotionally abused adult—treasures the precious nuggets of warmth and understanding she receives from the abuser. They are her lifeline and the basis of her sense of worth. She holds tenaciously to these occasional moments of empathetic connection. When they are withdrawn, she mourns their loss and tries desperately to regain them. Recapturing them and transforming them into a more consistent, empathetic, and lasting connection becomes her major quest in life. (p. 28)

In this study, several women spoke of this dynamic. Elliot moved between the kind partner who took Alice to Disney World when he found out she was pregnant to threatening her life on the return. Lori wondered where Kyle's kindness went after they were married. An angry, impatient man emerged during the honeymoon. Becka was drawn in by Gregg's fascination and obsession on her, but after his persistent criticism she wondered why he loved her. Eliza was perplexed when Colin suddenly began to question what she wore when before he had liked the way she dressed. This inconsistency was part of a pattern of psychological manipulation that pervaded all the women's relationships.

Awareness of Emotional Abuse

As with physical violence, it may be difficult for people to understand why women do not recognize they are being emotionally abused and leave. Because of attachment problems experienced as children and because of what they have learned from early relationships with caretakers, women experiencing emotional abuse may not see it as a problem. Loring (1994) found that few women experiencing emotional abuse identified themselves as being abused. They also assumed blame for the problems in the relationship (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994).

Only when women were able to question assumptions about themselves and their partners did awareness emerge (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994; Patrick-Hoffman, 1982, 1984). Chang (1996) found in her qualitative study that:

There is a major shift in perception from blaming herself to looking critically at him. She is no longer sure that he would be loving "if only" she made some change. By now she has tried so many times to satisfy him that she begins to question whether he can be satisfied. . . . In every case, her emerging awareness that there is nothing she could do that would affect his basically constant dissatisfaction was a critical factor in her ability to change her view of herself, her husband, and the relationship.

None of the women in this study labeled what they were experiencing as emotional abuse initially. Some became aware during the relationship, others after it was over, and the timing of this awareness was complex. For example, Vicki attributed the lack of information as a factor in her confusion about her partner's behavior:

Some of them [the abusive behaviors] I didn't really think about while they were occurring, but after the fact and towards the end of the relationship. It's funny because I never had anyone telling me, "He's doing this to you, you shouldn't put up with this." I don't know why. I guess because it was just mostly between he and I that he did a lot of these things. And it wasn't where other people would know. And I didn't, for some reason, I didn't feel comfortable telling other people at the time.

While Mary did not label the behaviors as emotionally abusive until the end of the relationship, there were moments when she realized something was wrong:

. . . [I]t wasn't as obvious to me that he [Michael] was as controlling as he was until after we got married. And after we got married, it almost seemed like he had me then. I became his property. I was his wife.

Her awareness that he was emotionally abusive was a ". . . gradual realization as time passed."

Women's awareness of emotional abuse was fostered by books, talks with friends, information from their work environment, and other experiences. These factors broadened and shifted the view of their situation and women began to see alternative ways of being in their relationships. This did not mean, however, that they immediately left unhealthy relationships. In general, women minimized the abuse.

Women's minimization of the abuse might have been related to the incomplete picture they had of what constitutes abuse. It may have been also a reflection of where they were in the healing process or developmentally. In this and previous studies, recognition that the partner's behavior was unacceptable and that they were in an

emotionally abusive relationship was a slow process (Chang, 1996; Few, 1999; Loring, 1994). It also required contact with people outside the relationship.

Time away from the emotionally abusive partner was essential and difficult to arrange. Five of the seven women reported being isolated from family and friends. When they did connect with others, the impact was profound. Becka gained a new sense of competence at Sister Spirit Camp and when she hiked the Appalachian Trail alone. House-sitting for a friend gave Lori the physical and emotional space to develop a different perspective of her emotional health. Although she did not leave her husband, Eliza escaped emotionally by going to graduate school, therapy, and support meetings.

It is important to highlight the factors that fostered women's awareness of the emotional abuse. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

Self-help books.

Self-help books were an important source of knowledge and comfort for several women. Three years into the relationship with Gregg, one of Becka's friends gave her *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* by Patricia Evans, a book that introduced her to the idea of emotional abuse. It contained excerpts of interviews with women who had experienced emotional abuse and Becka related to what she read: "I am recognizing all these statements by all these women. I've said that. I've felt that. I've been there. Of course it still took me over a year and a half to actually leave him."

Since reading this book, Becka has become hyper-aware of emotional abuse. She is much more cognizant of what people say to each other and how they say it.

Vicki discovered the concept of emotional abuse in a book and by talking with a therapist. It was a powerful realization that did not come until after she was divorced:

I'd look back and say, "Why did I put up with such nonsense from him?" I mean, "Why did I keep allowing him to do that?" So I did notice it. I didn't call it emotional abuse. I just called it annoying behaviors and being treated bad--not being treated like you should treat someone you care about. . . . Labeling it as emotional abuse, I would [not] have called it that until after I got divorced, went to a therapist, to discuss what things Donny had done to me and the patterns of other people in my life doing that. I've read a lot of self-help type books. *Healing the Child Within* [by Charles L. Whitfield] I thought was a great book. I realized then well, this has a name. It [is] a behavior pattern.

Other women identified books which helped them understand what they experienced. Alice found Harriet Lerner's, the *Dance of Anger* and the *Dance of Intimacy* helpful. Lori found that books about humor helped her feel better. Her favorite was Gary Larson's *The Far Side*.

Workplace cultures.

As a helping professional, Alice was aware of emotional abuse as a concept. She had in fact worked with women experiencing abuse. This did not insulate her, however, from becoming involved in an emotionally abusive relationship. She saw Elliot's behavior as emotionally abusive but she approached him in the same way that some helping professionals approach clients:

I think when you're in the caring or helping profession fields, you tend to think that you can just solve everybody's problems and that you just have to be supportive and [Elliot will] come around. Or if you just show him unconditional love, he'll learn. And that's hard.

Jordan's job provided her with knowledge that raised her awareness about emotional abuse, but this came after the relationship with Jeff ended:

I didn't have any information. I didn't have any knowledge about it. And there wasn't anybody that was giving that to me. That education didn't enter my world in any way. Working at the social service agency, I mean there's so many things that are considered worse, you know? One thing we know in our work is that neglect is often far worse than physical abuse and people don't see that [understand it]. I mean that really surprised me. I think that a lot of times that it's the same way with emotional abuse. People just don't recognize that.

While Mary's work environment taught her nothing about emotional abuse specifically, it provided her with a sense of competence that enhanced her self-esteem. This enabled her to leave the relationship. Mary and Jordan benefited from the competence they developed and felt at the workplace. Previous scholars have documented the importance of women's self-esteem and their ability to leave (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994; Patrick-Hoffman, 1982, 1984).

Validation through friends and others.

Chang (1996) found that validation from others supported and increased women's awareness of emotional abuse: ". . . [E]xternal support was necessary before they were able to leave; someone else had to identify the relationship as abusive and offer support and understanding" (p. 120). Friends and associates played a major role in women's awareness of the emotional abuse in this study. For example, a comment from a friend opened the door to a new view of Eliza's relationship with Colin:

I was talking to one friend and I was describing something to her (laughs). . . .

And she said, “Wow, you sound like a woman who’s abused who’s trying to make excuses for her abuser.” And it just clicked, you know. And I’m sure people had said things before that, but I was ready at that point to hear it.

Eliza’s account of this encounter suggested that she was processing at two levels. One level was the emotional place of when she made the comment to her friend. The other was from the place of denial at that moment. Eliza’s laughter and rising voice pitch during this portion of the interview were indicators of the anxiety she felt.

Becka had a group of friends who offered support and information that helped her leave the emotionally abusive relationship. While supporting her, they gave her the space to make her own decisions:

Two of the guys worked for MSV, Men Stopping Violence. And then my female friend worked [as] an advocate. Basically they were all trying to get me to move out and come live with them. Because they all saw. I mean it got to the point where a couple of them said, “We don’t want to be around the two of you together.”

They didn’t like to be around us cause they didn’t like the way we interacted. And of course I took that to mean they didn’t like me for awhile. And then they told me it was because they didn’t like Gregg. And then I had to defend Gregg. And it was like, “No, he’s really, he’s great, he’s really nice.” And Gregg was very hostile to them and [would] accuse me of purposefully making them not like him. And then I would go out of my way to try and tell them all the good things about him. It was like no, this is a good, positive relationship. (laughs)

They never said this is what he's doing, this is how it is, that sort of thing. . . . I'm all the time trying to explain to my friends, talking [about] what's wrong with me and all this stuff. And they're probably, thinking back on it, they're probably going, "Figure it out!", you know. But none of them ever came right out and said, "This is what he's doing. You need to leave him." They let me kind of learn on my own. And they never said point-blank. But the one, he gave me the book which was really, really helpful.

For Mary, a talk with her doctor confirmed that the marriage was unhealthy: And so at that point . . . I had gotten really, really sick and I couldn't get well. I had sinus infections and allergies and stuff like that. And I had gone to my doctor and he told me, I love my doctor, by the way, he's great. He said, "You know, Mary, you're young you should not be this sick. Are you ok? Is your marriage ok?" And when he said that I was like whoa.

The question of physical abuse.

In Chang's (1996) study, women reported that they thought physical abuse would have made it easier to leave the relationship. They interpreted emotional abuse as their partner's efforts to correct their faults:

Physical abuse was viewed as a solid, understandable communication. If he hits me, that means he does not love me. If he criticizes and verbally attacks me-- saying it is for my own good in order to help me become a better wife so he can love me--that must mean he does love me. She believes there must be something wrong with her after all; he does not think they have any problems and he does not hit her. (Chang, 1996, p. 98)

The women in this study voiced a similar sentiment. Mary said, “So when I married this man I thought, ‘Well I’m doing great. I mean he doesn’t hit me. This is a really good relationship.’ I never saw the other side coming. I never knew. I never saw it coming.”

Becka shared this perspective:

And at that point I remember thinking, “You know, if he would just hit me, then I could leave. Because at that point, I didn’t really recognize what was going on and in my mind the lines were don’t hang out with someone who hits you. But the idea of like being yelled at or being systematically told that you’re wrong in your ideas, and stuff like that, he would always contradict me when I made statements. I would be talking about something and he would say, “No, it’s not really that way.”

It’s just words, sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. . . . Therefore, I need to try harder because the person that I’m with and that I care about tells me these things. And if that’s how he perceives me than that’s obviously how I have to be.

The dynamics of the emotionally abusive relationship, the cumulative effect of emotional abuse over time, stereotypes about perpetrators and victims of physical abuse, and denial seemed to cloud women’s awareness of physical abuse. For example, Becka experienced physical abuse from her brother as a child but explained her brother’s behavior as a social adjustment problem.

The idea that domestic violence occurred among low-income and ethnic minority families prevented Lori from seeing her own relationship as abusive:

Before I had this relationship, I only knew about physical abuse. When you thought about domestic violence you just thought about people who were drunkards or some poor [people] that were out of their mind because they were doing something other than (laughs) just living normal lives, coming home and fighting. . . . [I] always thought it being in a certain class of people. So I think that what you're doing is really valuable because I feel like we need to get the information out there or that [clears throat].

Because Lori was uncomfortable linking her experience with women who had experienced physical violence, she withdrew from a support group for battered women:

I mean I couldn't even stay with that because that was so pitiful. . . . But at that point in time when I went to one of the groups they were all dealing with physical abuse. There wasn't an emotional abuse session. People were talking about these horrible things that happened to them physically and how they were hurt that way.

I knew that wasn't me. I [was] a little bit into that, but I knew my situation was different. My situation was just more in the emotional-mental realm. That I was being psychically attacked if you will. And I needed to have support in that realm on how to protect myself and help myself and get stronger.

Some of the women seemed to deny or misperceive the danger they were in.

Vicki explained how she felt about Donny: "I was never physically afraid of him, ever. And I don't know why. I mean he could have hurt me if he had wanted to but . . . I saw him as a coward, a big bully, very cowardly." Even when he held her up against the wall, Vicki did not back down:

One time I said you're just trying to be mean and intimidating. I don't understand why you do that? And he said, "Oh you want to see mean and intimidating?" And he picked me up [and said], "Eerrrr, I'm Mister He-Man," and held me up against the wall for about a second or two. [I said] put me down and I think I kicked at him but it wasn't meant to hurt him. I was just mad. I was furious. And so he let me go. So, it wasn't like he was trying to hurt me but it was a show of "I'm in control".

Several of the women were reluctant to label their relationships as abusive because there was no or little physical abuse involved. However, Alice wondered what she would have done had her partner become physically abusive:

(Sighs) I think sometimes with emotional abuse it's all in the perception. And what one woman, or man perceives as emotional abuse, someone else might not. And we can interpret things so many different ways. And if I would call him [Elliot] on something, "Oh, I didn't mean it that way. You know I didn't mean it that way." And so then [I started] thinking well maybe he really didn't mean it that way. Even though it hurt me, he really didn't mean to hurt me. The intent wasn't there. Whereas if he physically hits you, you've crossed that line. And that line is a very black and white line in both legal terms and, I think, in general...And I say I would leave. *I don't know if I would leave. I'm assuming that I would never tolerate that.* (says with emphasis) But I also know a lot of very wise women that have put up with physically abusive relationships, too. So, I don't know.

The extent to which emotional abuse is an indicator or predictor of the likelihood for physical abuse in a relationship is a phenomenon scholars still are exploring. Tolman (1989) speculated that the dominance-isolation sub-scale of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) might “. . . discriminate between battering and distressed relationships” (p. 176). Several of the items of the dominance-isolation sub-scale were included in the Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors that was used in this study. These items had to do with relationships where a partner isolated a woman from family and friends, monitored her time and activities, attempted to restrict her access to resources such as the telephone and finances, interfered with her opportunities (e.g., job, medical care, education), directed dominating behaviors at the woman, ordered her around, and expressed excessive jealousy. All seven of the women experienced some of those behaviors. Three women experienced all seven.

Although Lori was the only woman who reported experiencing physical abuse, physical abuse was evident or close to the surface in many of the women’s relationships. Vicki was picked up and held against the wall but she did not label this as abuse. Mary’s partner kicked her cat. Lori, Alice, and Eliza had their lives threatened overtly.

Turning Points and Epiphanies

In studies by Chang (1996) and Loring (1994), women described turning points and epiphanies when their perception of themselves and their relationships changed and they began to think about leaving. These turning points and epiphanies occurred despite the partners’ efforts to control the women (e.g., blocking access to resources or threatening to take the children). This was also true in the present study.

Denzin (1989) has described epiphanies as, “. . . interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives. In them, personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life. Their effects may be positive or negative” (p. 70). Denzin (1989) classified epiphanies into four forms:

(1) the *major event*, which touches every fabric of a person’s life; (2) the cumulative or *representative event*, which signifies eruptions or reactions to experiences which have been going on for a long period of time; (3) the *minor epiphany*, which symbolically represents a major, problematic moment in a relationship or a person’s life and (4) those episodes whose meanings are given in the *reliving* of the experience. (p. 71)

The talk with her doctor was a cumulative or representative event that helped Mary move out of her emotionally abusive marriage. Having someone whom she trusted and who was consistent in his concern for her, as was Mary’s doctor, enabled her to look critically at her husband and her own self-defeating behavior.

The feedback Mary received at work restored her self-esteem and brought her to another epiphany:

And, when I first got the job . . . I was nervous all the time. It was the first “professional job” that I’d ever had. And Michael had cut my self-esteem so much that I wasn’t even sure that I could do this job. It’s really stupid to think of that now. Cause I’m capable of doing this job. But when I started that job somebody could say one little thing to me and I was just like shaking and just a mess. So, the more that I did this job, the more I realized I was good at this job. And I started,

you know, having people around me look at my work and see that it was good work and then encourage me to do other things within our job. You know all that positive, “You are capable. You’re just made for this. You can deal with people well. You can write well.” So, at that point that gave me a little bit of self-esteem that I was capable of doing something.

To manage her feelings about the marriage, Mary talked herself into believing that things would get better eventually. Once Michael got the job he wanted--or when she got a different job--or when they bought a house--or once she got a different car, things would be better or so she told herself. Over time, she realized that this strategy had not and probably would not work. The decision about having children caused an epiphany:

So, the closer I got to the kid deadline, because literally he had our life planned until we died. Literally! He had a plan. We could not deviate from this plan. I started hearing myself say, “Well, you know, maybe once we have kids I’ll be happy because I’ll have something to concentrate on.” And then [it] was like, “Whoa, this is not right.” You never have children cause you think it’s going to fix a relationship. That scared me to death. It terrified me. And then it was like my head was spinning. I’ve got to get out of here. I’ve got to get myself out of this marriage before I have a child that’s going to be raised in this atmosphere. So, then it became [an] urgent, urgent need for me to get out of that relationship. That was the *defining moment* [italics added] where I realized I have to be out because I would never want to raise a child in the environment I grew up in. I don’t even really want children.

Vicki experienced several forms of epiphany that encouraged her to reassess the relationship with her husband. These included: (a) Donny's angry encounter with a driver who pulled a gun on them during a car trip out West, (b) Donny's sabotage of her plans to attend her brother's high school graduation, and (c) Donny's shredding of her college paper. The birth of her son was also a soul-searching moment: ". . . [D]uring that time I was thinking I'm miserable and I want to get out of this. I don't want my son being raised in this environment."

Becoming a mother was a turning point for Lori also. She did not want her daughter growing up in an abusive environment. She acknowledged that Kyle was capable of physical violence. She also acknowledged that the stress she was under was unbearable. The opportunity to house-sit set the stage for her exit:

I didn't tell him where I was. And [I] had the baby with me and of course at this point, [who] was four. And I woke up in that house for the first time realizing he didn't know where I was. And I had slept so great that night. And I mean seriously, it had been the first night's sleep that I had had where I felt safe. I reconnected with that feeling of safety and realized what it had cost me to [stay]. (laughs) And I just knew I wasn't going back. So I started making plans that day on how not to go back.

Having her life threatened and fear for the welfare of her child convinced Alice to end her relationship with Elliot: ". . . [I]t just got to the point.....where.....I, I had myself to protect and I had my unborn child at the time to protect." She left the state to return to school.

Becka made several trips alone that were representative events which took her out of Gregg's influence and control. She hiked along the Appalachian Trail and she went to Sister Spirit camp with friends who gave her information about emotionally abusive relationships.

A turning point usually implies a dramatic change of course that alters one's path irrevocably. What happened to the women in this study was something that was more gradual and less dramatic. It took time for women to leave these emotionally abusive relationships. Chang (1996) explained the process:

A pattern frequently found in physically abusive relationships but not common in psychologically abusive relationships is returning to the relationship many times before leaving for good. . . . In psychologically abusive relationships, the women do not leave until they have given up emotionally, turned to themselves for satisfaction, and gained external support. (p. 127)

In many respects this was true for the women in this study as well. Although the partners of two of the women ended their relationships, most women left after they had emotionally withdrawn from the relationship and after they had the support of family, friends, and/or co-workers.

Symptomology

Emotionally abusive relationships have a tremendous physical, mental, and emotional cost:

For most psychologically abused women, giving up hope that the relationship will improve often takes a long time. By the time psychologically abused women finally give up on getting what they want in the relationship, give up on making it

okay, give up on the fantasy of living happily ever after, they are exhausted, depressed, and, in many cases, physically sick. (Chang 1996, p. 117)

It is likely that Mary's irritable bowel syndrome and recurring sinus problems were exacerbated by emotional abuse. Both Mary and Vicki experienced anxiety during and after leaving their emotionally abusive relationships. Although no longer experiencing anxiety, she is afraid to give up her medication for fear that it will return:

I'm still afraid to come off my anti-depressants because I'm afraid of having to hold it all together at work. And the anxiety, I don't want that to come back. And that's what I need to talk to somebody about. Because I feel like I need to move on.

Women experienced depression and suicidal thoughts during and after their emotionally abusive relationships. Vicki connected her continuing struggle with depression to her emotionally abusive marriage:

. . . [S]ince I've been divorced, I [have] been on anti-depressants. I started out having anxiety attacks and one of my doctors said major depression. It's never been to the point of, you know, I want to kill myself. But it's been [that] I just don't want to get up today. I have had a lot of struggles with that. And, in addition to that, hyperthyroidism which also kind of makes you real draggy.

Lori spoke of a similar experience:

I got really depressed at one point, really sad. I was having perpetual suicide thoughts *even though I knew I wasn't going to do it* (says with emphasis) because I definitely am not leaving my child to him! (laughs) I wasn't going to do that. But yet I was (voice softens) I was just depressed you know.

Although she did not consider suicide at the time, Mary believed that it could have happened had she remained in her marriage. Not until she was out of the relationship did she realize the depth of her pain:

And I can honestly say that if I had stayed in that marriage, and it had been a twenty-year marriage, I probably would have killed myself by the end of it, do you know what I mean? . . . But once you're out and you realize how unhappy you are. To imagine myself with him for the next twenty years, I think I would have just said, ok, I can't take this anymore. You know? There wouldn't have been anything left. And if there was anything left, I would have just been a zombie I think. And I don't know if that sounds really over dramatic.

Becka also mentioned suicide: "I packed up my car. And I told him that I had to leave. Either I was going to kill myself or I was going to leave. I drove away."

Several of the women exhibited anxious speech patterns during the interviews. When they discussed dramatic or painful episodes, they laughed, sighed, paused for long periods, stammered or dotted their speech with modifiers like "very" or "really." In a few instances, women became tearful. Yet, they insisted that they wanted to continue with the interview. That the recounting of past emotionally abusive relationships was discomforting is an indication of its enduring impact on the women's lives.

Research Question II

The purpose of research question two was to explore factors associated with women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships. Two were found: (a) emotional abuse in the family of origin and (b) emotional abuse as a relationship pattern.

Emotional Abuse in the Family of Origin

Several scholars have suggested that women who experience emotional abuse in their families of origin have developed an anxious attachment style that encourages them to choose a partner who will be just as emotionally unavailable as their parents were (Loring, 1994; O'Hearn & Davis, 1997). This sets the stage for repeated trauma in romantic relationships, as women seek empathy and connection but are repeatedly rebuffed, discounted or ridiculed by an emotionally abusive partner (Loring, 1994; O'Hearn & Davis, 1997). Loring (1994) explained:

Thus the emotionally abused adult is caught in a dilemma. By choosing for her life partner a person as incapable of consistent empathetic bonding as her parent, she is attempting to reconstruct a lost childhood. Although victims often report tantalizing moments in which the abuser seems to connect with genuine empathy and encouragement, such moments do not last. The longed-for bond with a consistently warm and responsive partner is simply not available in an emotionally abusive relationship. (p. 29)

In previous studies of women in emotionally abusive relationships, researchers have found that the majority experienced emotional abuse in their family of origin (Chang, 1996; Few, 1999; Loring, 1994; O'Hearn & Davis, 1997). The history of emotional abuse in their families appears to make women more susceptible to emotional abuse in their romantic relationships because, “. . . it has become a way of life.” (Loring, 1994, p. 8)

All the women in this study reported that they had experienced emotional abuse from someone in their family of origin. They cited this as one of the reasons they might

have entered an emotionally abusive relationship and why they had difficulty recognizing it.

Mary reported that her mother often screamed at her, that both her parents physically neglected her, and that she took care of her mother in the middle of the night. Vicki's parents were critical of her, her father made degrading comments to her, and her mother made degrading statements about her to other people. Jordan described her parent's neglectful attitude as "abusive."

Becka's brother was critical of her, called her names, and hit her in the face. Lori reported that her mother was critical, dismissive, and demanded that they have the same religious beliefs. Eliza's parents negated her feelings and ideas, threatened to abandon her emotionally, and had unrealistic expectations of her. Alice reported that her mother was critical and negated her feelings.

For all but one of the women, there was an association between the types of emotional abuse they had experienced in the families of origin and what they experienced in intimate relationships. Alice saw similarities between her mother's and Elliot's constant criticism of her. Neither seemed to think that anything she did was good enough.

Eliza described what she experienced in her family of origin as "emotional incest . . . definite crossing of boundaries. I did lots of taking care of both of my parents." She connected her emotional abuse as a child and her involvement in emotionally abusive relationships as an adult: "I was definitely primed by my childhood to be in a relationship like that."

Mary witnessed abuse between her parents and had abuse directed at her. That experience, she believed, colored how she saw relationships:

Well, I think that I didn't necessarily pick the best people for me. I think a lot of what I understood love to be was [that] it was only love if it hurt. Because people hurt you when they love you and that's how you can tell it's love. That sounds really screwed up but I've been through therapy before because of my home life. Like I said, [I had] a rough home life growing up. That was something that I realized. And even now, I mean I don't think I realized it as much as I do now. You know what I mean? So relationships that were not stormy didn't seem like true relationships for awhile.

Criticism was a core aspect of Vicki's childhood. Her father criticized her and her mother. Even though her parents were helpful financially when she divorced, they remained emotionally distant. Vicki's perception of her family has changed over time:

. . . [T]he older I get the more dysfunctional I realize my family is. Not in the stereotypical, alcoholism, physical abuse or sexual abuse or anything like that. But they don't communicate like normal people should. Or the way I would like it, I should say.

Although Becka described her family in a positive vein she linked the emotional abuse her brother directed at her to the emotional abuse she experienced from Gregg. Both denigrated and communicated a disapproval of who she was. Becka's parents interpreted her brother's behavior as sibling rivalry. Becka came to see it otherwise. Because he was her big brother and because of her trusting nature, she took what he said to heart, ". . . [W]hen he said that I was ugly and goofy and whatever I was like, 'Yeah, ok so I'm ugly and I'm goofy so no one's ever going to like me. But you know, ok fine.'"

Jordan grew up in an abusive and neglectful family. It took time, information gained at her job in a social service agency, and therapy for her to realize that she had been emotionally abused:

I don't think I realized it until I started working at the agency and was more involved in the field. I've been in therapy for a little over a year and have just become more knowledgeable about it. And even then it was harder to see it in myself. It was kind of [a] gradual acceptance. I could see it real easy in other people and other relationships.

All of the women in this study saw some connection between the emotional abuse they experienced in their families of origin and in their intimate relationships. Some like Alice, Vicki, and Lori saw a direct link between parents and partners' criticism of the women. Becka identified the general pattern of her relationship with her brother--seeking his approval of who she was and what she did--as similar to what she experienced with Gregg. Mary, Jordan, and Eliza believed that the fact that they had grown up in abusive environments made them susceptible to emotional abuse.

Emotional Abuse as a Relationship Pattern

In addition to having experienced emotional abuse in the family of origin, most of the women in this study experienced emotional abuse in more than one intimate relationship. Mary had two abusive boyfriends, Russell and Oliver, prior to her marriage to Michael. Vicki had several emotionally abusive boyfriends, as well as with Donny, her ex-husband. In addition to her emotionally abusive relationship with Jeff, Jordan had a brief relationship with a boyfriend, Marvin, who was emotionally and physically abusive. Lori alluded to having had emotionally abusive relationships in high school but discussed

only the relationship with her ex-husband Kyle. Eliza had two emotionally abusive boyfriends, Taylor and Jack, prior to her marriage to her emotionally abusive ex-husband, Colin. Alice and Becka discussed their emotionally abusive relationships with Elliot and Gregg, respectively.

Given the history of emotional abuse in their families of origin, it may have been difficult for women to realize that they were in intimate relationships that were emotionally abusive. None identified the behavior as abusive initially. According to Loring (1994), “As the experience of being emotionally mistreated often begins early in childhood, the victim cannot conceive that another, entirely different kind of relationship is possible” (p. 8).

Some speculated about the long-term impact of emotional abuse in previous/early relationships. Only in retrospect did Vicki realize she had been emotionally abused by her boyfriend, Tim. She has also acknowledged the similarities between Tim and her ex-husband, Donny:

Now, Donny was mean with his criticism it was usually in anger. You know, “You’re so stupid. I can’t believe you, blah, blah, blah. “How could you do this?” . . . [He was] looking for things to pick fights with. But Tim was more putting me down in a way that was making me feel like I was not smart enough or good enough.

They both isolated her, interfered with opportunities (e.g., job, education, medical care), had unrealistic expectations, withheld affection, and interrupted eating and sleeping habits:

They [Tim and Donny] didn't think anything of waking me up out of a sound sleep to either ask me to take them some where or to go get them something or to have sex. All the time. I almost got to the point where I thought, "Well this must be normal. This must be the way people are." And I would just get mad sometimes, but usually with my ex-husband, I would just give in. [H]e would just pitch fits. And it was like, ok, it's easier to just go ahead and get it over with. That's the way he was, very demanding. Tim was more just manipulative. "Oh please . . . I just need you to take me here. Or I need you to just go get me this or get me something."

Another factor associated with women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships is how quickly the relationship developed. Five of the seven women said that the relationship with that emotionally abusive partner became intense and committed very early. For example, Jordan and Jeff were dating exclusively within two months. Lori married Kyle in four months. Beth left a job in Europe to return to Colin, and then soon after move in with him. In hindsight, women identified the quickness with which the relationship developed as a problem. The intensity drew them in and got them caught up in the relationship with no time to reflect.

Research Question III

The purpose of research question three was to explore the factors associated with women's exit and recovery from emotionally abusive relationships. The role of support networks and the healing process are discussed in this section.

The Role of Support Networks

Chang (1996) found that support networks were critical for women who were exiting emotionally abusive relationships. This support came from friends, family, and therapists who validated the women's view that something was wrong with the relationship. Chang (1996) explained:

With the shift to self-satisfaction, the women became less emotionally involved with their husbands; however, the decision to leave the relationship was still a frightening one. . . . This outside support is an even more essential catalyst in psychologically abusive relationships because the abuse does not leave visible scars and the husbands constantly tell them nothing is wrong. (p. 120)

In this study, friends, co-workers, and family comprised the support systems that helped women through the experience of emotional abuse. Not all the women, however, found the support they needed. Some families were not supportive initially. Some took a stance against women leaving the marriage or relationship. Family opposition to women's leaving the relationship usually changed once they became aware of the emotional abuse.

Vicki did not tell friends or family about the abuse in her marriage until the relationship was over for fear of being seen in a negative light. Vicki was accustomed to negative criticism from her parents and, perhaps, wanted to avoid being blamed for a "failed" marriage. She described her family as connected but not very emotional. Only her older brother, who was also experiencing divorce, offered emotional support. Her parents helped financially and with the children, yet:

. . . [T]hey still really didn't understand. They didn't see a lot of these behaviors. And when I was telling my mother about it, she [is] one of those [people that say] well, it's over now, so just, you know. And then my dad was like, "You're not the only person it's happened to. Get over it. You need to get back to work". You know just move on.

Given that most emotionally abused women do not identify abuse as a problem or necessarily know how to identify it, Vicki's reaction--that something was wrong, that she had no word for it, and that it was not physical abuse--was typical (Chang, 1996; Loring, 1994).

One surprising support for Vicki was her husband's soon-to-be ex-wife, Michelle. After Michelle broke up with Donny she and Vicki became good friends. Vicki got validation from Michelle that she could not have gotten anywhere else:

It was very cathartic. I mean we joked about it. She had a great sense of humor, that's one thing. I really do too and so we would just be laughing until we were crying about a lot of things. He was emotionally abusive towards her and she actually had physical fear of him. We discussed that a lot cause she seemed to be more in control. But her personality is so much different than mine in that way. We talked a lot about our similarities and differences and what we felt. And I thought well this is better than a therapist! It's somebody who's actually been through what I've been through. (laughs) So, I feel like that was very helpful, you know. Cause up until then I had never really discussed it with anybody.

Like Vicki, Alice has not received much support from her family largely because she hid Elliot's emotionally abusive behavior from them. Perhaps because Alice has

experienced criticism from her mother, she felt that disclosing his abusive behavior would leave her vulnerable to further criticism or blame. So Alice protected Elliot's image (and implicitly herself) in her mother's eyes by hiding his behavior.

Alice's friends, however, were an invaluable source of support:

I have the best friends in the whole wide world. . . . I give them so much credit because no matter how often I call, they're still there. And they don't [say], "Oh, you've been down this road before!" They don't beat me up as much as I beat myself up about being in the same place *again and again and again* (says with emphasis). And I'm grateful for that.

Becka's friends and associates were key to her ability to get out of the relationship. Of especial importance was the Sister Spirit Camp experience which gave her a sense of confidence, competence, and awareness of her intelligence and abilities. Becka's mother, a religious woman, was against divorce. She left pamphlets that said "marriage is forever" and that "God hates divorce" around the house.

Eliza credits her girlfriends and therapist with providing her with support. One friend came to stay for a few days when Eliza decided to get a divorce. Eliza described her reliance on friends:

I had been kind of isolated socially in [that] I would go to school and I would go back home. And I started to really want to do stuff. I had some friends who were great you know. So I would say to them, "Hi, I really need to be with somebody tonight. I'm coming over." (laughs)

The Healing Process

In Patrick-Hoffman's (1984) study, emotional abuse did significant damage to women's self-esteem:

Each woman reported that the longer the abuse continued, the more she accepted the evaluation of herself that she heard. She was also likely to believe that the relationship she was in was the best one that she could expect to achieve. The women reported that they were told this frequently by the abuser and, because they were accepting of the assessment of the abuser, they believed they could hope for no better, or at least feared they could do no better. (p. 39)

This was true for the women in this study as well. However, they gradually came to see themselves in a more positive light. The process of re-envisioning themselves began at different times for each of them. A few months after the divorce, Mary still had difficulties but she was regaining trust in her own judgment and decisions:

I don't know maybe my childhood prepared me for that as an adult but.....(sighs) I think probably the most important thing was having the hope that there would be something better on the other side. Because I knew just from being a kid and having my art and being good at that and knowing that [is what] I wanted to do. . . . [B]ut my art I knew that would get me out of my home. So I always had that hope. I couldn't see myself really far in the future. But I could always see far enough to know that I could get to the other side.

Like Mary, Vicki thought she had lost her good judgment and instincts during the marriage. After the marriage ended, Vicki described herself as, “. . . [J]ust a mess. I mean

that's all I can [say], an emotional mess. I was confused, angry, hurt, very self-doubting. I didn't want to interact with people. I was very depressed.”

Vicki has slowly discovered that she is a strong woman capable of taking care of herself. Her strengths include her sensitivity to others' feelings, an ability “to project a laid-back attitude” in the face of difficulties, an ability to nurture her kids, a sense of humor, and a willingness to take chances.

Jordan suffered with self-doubt, low self-esteem, and no confidence as a result of the emotional abuse. In time--with a new job, re-connection with some old friends, connections with new friends, and a different experience in a new relationship, Jordan has become a healthier person confident of her abilities. She also finds it easier to speak up for what she wants now.

Alice was immobilized by the negative self-image of herself in the emotionally abusive relationship:

I think that's one of the hardest [things] when you look internally and you try to figure out what makes you stay. And then you feel like a loser because you stay.

And you feel like a loser.....because you can't leave. You can't put a stop to it.

After the relationship ended, Alice described herself as happy, confident, and competent.

She is especially positive about her career goals and professional competence.

Eliza echoed the other women's negative view of themselves while they were in emotionally abusive relationships:

. . .I felt really horrible about myself in general. I didn't like myself. I didn't feel good about anything that I was doing in school and anything that I was doing at all. . . . I just felt like I was fighting uphill all the time. There was nothing I could

do that seemed to satisfy Colin and he was the person who I most wanted to please.

These perceptions began to change when they separated. Eliza began to feel strong and capable. She also decided, “. . . to face some of her fears.”

During her relationship, Becka was indecisive, had no goals in life, and saw herself as unlovable. It was hard for her to leave, but when she did she felt better than she had for months. Becka knew that she was a good person, although on the surface she wondered about herself. Her strengths helped her move beyond the divorce, develop new goals, and re-connect with friends.

Lori felt shame while she was married to Kyle. After the relationship was over, she viewed herself negatively and engaged in several potentially self-destructive behaviors. Lori has worked through her feelings and now the shame is gone. She described herself as someone who is a, “. . . careful person about relationships and who[m] I'll let into my life.” She has set a goal of learning to handle money and her personal finances. She also credits a strong code of honor and courage as a factor in changing her life.

Conclusions

The purpose of research question one was to explore how women described and assigned meaning to their history, perception, and experience of emotional abuse. The women in this study experienced between 19 to 33 types of abuse listed in the 36-item Checklist. All experienced at least two forms of covert emotional abuse, which is believed to be most damaging to women's sense of self. Women's awareness of emotional abuse emerged slowly with the women initially doubting their own judgment.

Self-help books, talks with friends, supportive work environments, and multiple turning points and epiphanies, increased their awareness that something was wrong. The physical, emotional, and mental costs associated with emotional abuse were expressed in several symptoms. Women were depressed, anxious, and sometimes suicidal before, during, and after leaving their relationships.

The purpose of research question two was to explore factors associated with women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships. Two themes emerged: (a) emotional abuse in the family of origin and (b) emotional abuse as a relationship pattern. Women in this study had experienced emotional abuse in their family of origin most often from their parents, but in one case, from a sibling. All of the women reported a link between the experience of emotional abuse in their families and their involvement in emotionally abusive relationships. For several women, the types of abuse experienced in their family of origin mirrored the type of abuse they experienced in intimate relationships. These findings were consistent with the work of Loring (1994) and Chang (1996).

The purpose of research question three was to explore those factors that are associated with women's exit and recovery from emotionally abusive relationships. Two themes were related to this: (a) the role of support networks and (b) the healing process. Support networks that were comprised of friends, family, co-workers, therapists, and others were found to be essential in helping women to become aware of the emotional abuse, to re-build their self-esteem, and to move out of emotionally abusive relationships.

Women had different ways of healing from the emotional abuse and were at different points in the healing process. The length of time out of the relationship was not

necessarily an indicator that a woman was further along in her healing. More important was the degree to which women saw themselves in a positive light and valued their personal strengths and competence.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The implications of this study have relevance for future research and clinical work on women and emotional abuse. In terms of research, there are several areas to be pursued.

1. There is a need for continued exploration of the connection between emotional abuse experienced in the family of origin and women's subsequent involvement in emotionally abusive relationships.

2. There is a need for exploration of the women's involvement in emotionally abusive relationships in other contexts (e.g., workplace, friendships, etc.).

3. There is a need for exploration of the interpersonal dynamics of women's experience of emotional abuse.

In terms of clinical work, there are also several areas to be pursued.

1. There is a need for better assessment and training that examines the link between family of origin issues and women's involvement in emotionally abusive intimate relationships.

2. There is a need for better education of clinicians on the issue of emotional abuse and its correlates.

3. There is a need for the development of women's support groups that focus specifically on emotional abuse, as opposed to combining victims of emotional abuse with victims of physical abuse.

4. There is a need for the development of community-based prevention programs for women, especially young women.

Perhaps the most important goal for researchers and clinicians is to make the problem of emotional abuse visible to the public and those individuals who are victimized by it.

REFERENCES

Aguilar, R. J., & Nightingale, N. N. (1994). The impact of specific battering experiences on the self-esteem of abused women. *Journal of Family Violence, 9*(1), 35-45.

Alexander, I. E., (1988). Personality, psychological assessment, and psychobiography. In D. P. Mc Adams & R. L. Ochberg (Eds.), *Psychobiography and life narratives* (pp. 265-294). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

American Psychiatric Association, (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: The American Psychiatric Association.

Bowlby, J. (1977). The making and breaking of affectional bonds: Aetiology and psychopathology in the light of attachment theory. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 130*, 201-210.

Brady, K. T., Killeen, T. K., Brewerton, T., & Lucerini, S. (2000). Comorbidity of psychiatric disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 61*(Suppl. 7), 22-32.

Brennan, K. A. & Shaver, P. R. (1995). Dimensions of adult attachment, affect regulation, and romantic relationship functioning. *Society for Personality and Social Psychology, 21*(3), 267-283.

- Chang, V.N. (1996). *I just lost myself: Psychological abuse of women in marriage*. Westport, CT.: Praeger Publishers.
- Clark, M. L., Beckett, J., Wells, M., & Dungee-Anderson, D. (1994). Courtship violence among African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 20*(3), 264-281.
- Collins, N. L. & Read, S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*(4), 644-663.
- Cortazzi, M. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Washington D C: Falmer Press.
- Denzin, Norman. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dutton, D. G., & Painter, S. (1993). The battered woman syndrome: Effects of severity and intermittency of abuse. *American Orthopsychiatric Association, 63*(4), 614-622.
- Few, A. L. (1999). *An exploration of the experiences of heterosexual black college women who leave psychologically abusive dating relationships*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.
- Follingstad, D. R., Rutledge, L. L., Berg, B. J., Hause, E. S., & Polek, D. S. (1990). The role of emotional abuse in physically abusive relationships. *Journal of Family Violence, 5*(2), 107-120.
- Groves, P. A. (1991). An analysis of physical conflict in lesbian relationships (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1991). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 52*, A684.

Hazen, C. & Shaver, P. R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511-524.

Hazen, C. & Shaver, P. R. (1990). Love and work: An attachment-theoretical perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(2), 270-280.

Henderson, A. J. Z., Bartholmew, K., & Dutton, D. G. (1997). He loves me, he loves me not: Attachment and separation resolution of abused women. *Journal of Family Violence*, 12(2) 169-191.

Kasian, M., & Painter, S. (1992). Frequency and severity of psychological abuse in a dating population. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 7(3), 350-364.

Katz, J. & Arias, I. (1999). Psychological Abuse and Depressive Symptoms in dating women: Do different types of abuse have differential effects? *Journal of Family Violence*, 14(3), 281-295.

Kelly & DeKeserdy, (1994). Women's fear of crime and abuse in college and university dating relationships. *Violence and Victims*, 9(1), 17-30.

Kirkpatrick, L. A. & Davis, K. E. (1994). Attachment style, gender, and relationship stability: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(3), 502-512.

Kobak, R. R. & Sceery, A. (1988). Attachment in late adolescence: Working models, affect regulation, and representations of self and others. *Child Development*, 59, 135-146.

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.

Lane, K. E. & Gwartney-Gibbs, P. A. (1985). Violence in the context of dating and sex. *Journal of Family Issues*, 6(1), 45-59.

LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed). New York: Academic Press.

Lincoln & Guba (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindsey, E. W. (1994). *Creating a new home: The process by which mother-headed homeless families become stably rehoused*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Georgia, Athens.

Loring, M. T. (1994). *Emotional Abuse*. New York: Lexington Books.

Lupri, E., Grandin, E., & Brinkerhoff, M. B. (1994). Socioeconomic status and male violence in the Canadian home: A reexamination. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 19(1), 47-73.

Migeot, M. & Lester, D. (1996). Psychological abuse in dating, locus of control, depression, and suicidal preoccupation. *Psychological Reports*, 79, 682.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Molidor, C. E. (1993). Adolescent dating violence: Prevalence rates and contextual issues. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54, A1543.

Molidor, C. E. (1995). Gender differences of psychological abuse in high school dating relationships. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 12(2), 119-134.

Morse, M. A. (1993). *Emotional abuse in dating relationships*. Unpublished master's thesis, The University of Georgia, Athens.

O'Hearn, R. E. (1992). Dimensions of attachment and their relevance to emotional abuse in intimate relationships (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1992). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 53 (01), 6603. (UMI No. 9239076)

O'Hearn, R. E. & Davis, K. E. (1997). Women's experiences of giving and receiving emotional abuse. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 12(3), 375-391.

Orava, T. A., McLeod, P. J., & Sharpe, D. (1996). Perceptions of control, depressive symptomatology and self-esteem of women in transition from abusive relationships. *Journal of Family Violence*, 11(2), 167-186.

Patrick-Hoffman, P. (1982). *Psychological abuse of women by spouses or live-in lovers: What form can it take?* (Report No. CG-016470). Minneapolis, MN: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Psychological Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 226 277)

Patrick-Hoffman, P. (1984). Psychological abuse of women by spouses and live-in lovers. *Women & Therapy*, 3(1), 37-47.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pipes, R. B. & LeBov-Keeler, K. (1997). Psychological abuse among college women in exclusive heterosexual dating relationships. *Sex Roles*, 36(9/10), 585-603.

Raymond, B., & Bruschi, I. G. (1989). Psychological abuse among college women in dating relationships. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 69, 1283-1297.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rollstin, A. O. & Kern, J. M. (1998). Correlates of battered women's psychological distress: Severity of abuse and duration of the postabuse period.

Psychological Reports, 82, 387-394.

Rouse, L. P. (1988). Abuse in dating relationships: A comparison of Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. *Journal of College Student Development, 29*, 312-319.

Shepard, M. F., & Campbell, J. A. (1992). The abusive behavior inventory: A measure of psychological and physical abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 7*(3), 291-305.

Steinmetz, S. K. (1987). Family violence: Past, present, and future. In M. B. Sussman, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Handbook of marriage and the family* (pp. 725-766). New York: Plenum Press.

Stets, J. E. (1990). Verbal and physical aggression in marriage. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52*, 501-514.

Stets, J. E. (1991). Psychological aggression in dating relationships: The role of interpersonal control. *Journal of Family Violence, 6*(1), 97-114.

Straus, M. (1979). Measuring intrafamilial conflict and violence: The conflict tactics (ct) scales. *Journal of Marriage and the Family 45*, 75-88.

Straus, M. A. & Gelles, R. J. (1986). Societal change and change in family violence from 1975 to 1985 as revealed by two national surveys. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48*, 465-479.

Straus, M. A., Gelles, R. J., & Steinmetz, S. K. (1980). *Behind closed doors: Violence in the american family*. New York: Anchor Press.

Sugarman, D. & Hotaling, G. (1989). Dating violence: Prevalence, context, and risk markers. In M. Pirog-Good, & J. Stets (Eds.), *Violence in dating relationships: Emerging social issues* (pp. 3-32). New York: Praeger Publishers.

Symes, L. (1995). Post traumatic stress disorder: An evolving concept. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 9(4), 195-202.

Tolman, R. M. (1989). The development of a measure of psychological maltreatment of women by their male partners. *Violence and Victims*, 4(3), 159-177.

Tuel, B. D. & Russell, R. K. (1998). Self-esteem and depression in battered women: A comparison of lesbian and heterosexual survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 4(3), 344-362.

Vitanza, S., Vogel, L. C. M., & Marshall, L. L. (1995). Distress and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder in abused women. *Violence and Victims*, 10(1), 23-34.

Walker, L. E. (1979). *The battered woman*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Walker, L. E. (1984). *The battered woman syndrome*. New York: Springer Publishing Co., Inc.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LETTER TO CONTACTS AND RESOURCE PEOPLE

Dear X:

My name is Melissa Anne Morse and I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Georgia Marriage and Family Therapy Program in the Department of Child and Family Development. I have been interested for a number of years in understanding the experience and impact of emotional abuse in women's lives. This has been my area of research for both my masters and doctoral program as well as an area of interest for my work as a therapist. For my dissertation I want to interview women about their experiences with emotional abuse in heterosexual and lesbian relationships. I am looking for women: (1) who are between the ages of 30 and 45; (2) who have little or no experience of physical abuse in their romantic relationships; (3) who identify as heterosexual or lesbian; and (4) who are no longer in the emotionally abusive relationship. The interviews will last approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours each.

I want to understand more about what women define as emotionally abusive behavior and how their view of what constitutes emotional abuse may have changed over time. I also am interested in learning more about what has helped them move beyond the abuse.

I understand that women talking about their experiences of emotional abuse may be difficult and cause some discomfort at the time. However, one of the main purposes for this study is to learn more about how women move beyond the emotional abuse. I think women participating in these interviews may experience some benefits as well. One of the purposes of this study is to allow women to tell their stories and talk about the meaning they find in their experiences in their own words. It can provide an opportunity for women to speak about their personal strengths and resiliency that allowed them to move beyond the abuse and out of the relationship.

I am sending this letter with the hope that you will share the information about my research with clients who have experienced emotional in their romantic relationships and who you think might be interested in participating in two interviews that would last 1-1.5 hours each. I also ask that you share the information with other clinicians. You can contact me at 706-549-7755. My faculty advisor is Patricia Bell-Scott, Ph.D. and she can be reached at 706-542-4902. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Anne Morse, M.S.

Research at The University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Institutional Review Board; Office of V.P. for Research; The University of Georgia; 604A Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514.

APPENDIX B

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

Ph.D. student looking for women who identify as heterosexual or lesbian, who are between 30-45, and who have had a partner in a romantic relationship do any of the following things: insult or shame you; discount your ideas or feelings; ridicule you; ignore you; yell, scream or swear at you; give you the silent treatment; have unrealistic expectations; withhold affection. If you are interested in participating in two confidential interviews for a dissertation study for \$40.00 contact Melissa at 706-353-2309 ext. 368 or send your name and address or phone number and best times to reach you to Melissa at P.O. Box ###, Athens, GA 3060##.

APPENDIX C

FLYER

HAVE YOU BEEN IN A DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP?

- ◆ Are you female?
- ◆ Have you had a male partner in a romantic relationship do any of the following things:

• put you down about/over your physical appearance	• monitor your time or activities
• insult or shame you	• give you the silent treatment
• discount your ideas or feelings	• humiliate you in front of people
• criticize you	• slam doors
• ridicule you	• threaten to abandon you
• belittle you	• yell, scream or swear at you
• call you names	• have unrealistic expectations
• try to isolate you from family & friends	• attempt to control your access to money
• order you around	• sulk
• ignore you	• withhold affection

- ◆ Are you between the ages of 30 and 45?
- ◆ Have you experienced little or no physical abuse in your romantic relationships?
- ◆ Would you be interested in participating in a dissertation study of these kind of experiences?
- ◆ Are you interested in making \$40.00 for participating in two confidential interviews?
- ◆ If you are interested or want more information please contact Melissa at 706-353-2309 ext.360.

My faculty advisor is Dr. P. Bell-Scott, Ph.D. and she can be reached at 706-542-4899. Research at The University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Institutional Review Board; Office of V.P. for Research; The University of Georgia; 604A Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514.

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date
Name
Address
City

Dear _____,

Let me introduce myself. My name is Melissa Morse. I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Georgia Marriage and Family Therapy Program in the Department of Child and Family Development who is doing a study on women and their experiences of emotional abuse. I am contacting a variety of women about their experiences. Would you be willing to talk with me about your experiences?

_____ provided me your name and address because she felt you would be a valuable person with whom I could talk about this topic. It is my understanding that she has spoken to you about my contacting you. I will be calling you next week to find out if you are interested in participating and if you have any questions for me. At that time, I can provide you with further information about this project and explain what your participation would entail. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary, information you provide will be kept confidential, and consent can be withdrawn at any time.

If you have any questions or want to contact me prior to next week. I can be reached at (706) 549-7755 between 9am and 6pm. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Patricia Bell-Scott, Ph.D., if needed, at 706-542-4902.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Anne Morse, M.S.

Research at The University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Institutional Review Board; Office of V.P. for Research; The University of Georgia; 604A Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514.

APPENDIX E

SCREENING TOOL QUESTIONS

These questions will be used in telephone conversations, letters, or in person to screen out inappropriate candidates for the interview.

1. How old?
2. Have you ever experienced any of the following in your relationships? (indicators of physical abuse: pushing, slapping, grabbing, shoving, hitting with a hand or something else, kicking, biting, beating up, or use a weapon, or any other kind of physical action)
3. If so, how frequently did this occur over the course of your relationship?
4. When was the last time you experienced any of the previously mentioned behaviors?
5. Did these type of behaviors occur in any of your other relationships?
6. Have you ever experienced any of the following behaviors in your most recent or previous relationships: put down your physical appearance, insults or shaming you, discounting your ideas or feelings, criticizing you, ridiculing, belittling, humiliation in front of people, tried to isolate from family & friends, ordering around, ignoring, yelling, screaming or swearing at, the silent treatment, name-calling, slamming doors, threatened to abandon, monitoring your time or activities, had unrealistic expectations, attempted to control your access to money, sulking, withholding of affection.
7. If so, how frequently did this occur over the course of your relationship?
8. Are you currently in the relationship in which these behaviors or the physical behaviors (question 2) occurred?
9. When was the last time you experienced any of the previously mentioned behaviors?
10. Women who are screened out for any reason will receive a list of counseling resources.

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT

I agree to participate in the research titled, Women's Experiences of Emotional Abuse, which is being conducted by Melissa Anne Morse, Department of Child and Family Development, (706) 542-4831. I understand her faculty advisor is Patricia Bell-Scott, Ph.D., Department of Child and Family Development, (706) 542-4902. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. This research study is being conducted to gain a more in depth understanding of women's experiences of emotional abuse across relationship contexts and to learn more about how women make sense of these experiences.
2. The primary benefit I may expect from participation is a reaffirmation of my personal strengths and abilities. I may expect to be reminded of the changes I have made in my life which have allowed me to move beyond the emotional abuse I experienced in a past relationship. I am also aware that I am contributing to much needed research on subjective experiences of emotional abuse which will provide valuable information to those working to assist women experiencing emotional abuse.
3. I will engage in two one-on-one interviews at a location negotiated by the researcher and myself. The interviews will be semi-structured lasting approximately 1-1 ½ hours each or a time set to my comfort. I will be invited to share only information that I am comfortable discussing. I can request that the recorder be turned off or not used at any time. The interviewer may take some written notes during the interview. I can be expected to answer questions concerning my experiences of emotional abuse. I am willing to be available to talk to the investigator, Melissa Morse, for approximately two months following the initial interview for follow up interviews and member validation. However, I realize I can discontinue my participation at any time for any reason. I can expect to receive \$40.00 after the completion of the second interview. If I do not complete the second interview I understand I will not receive any money. The interviews will be audio-taped. Tapes will be erased as soon as the transcription process has been completed.

4. The discomforts or stresses that may be faced during this research are those related to dealing with some of the emotional issues which are part of reviewing past and present relationships. Anytime one is asked about any subject the question may elicit a new perspective on that issue. It is possible then, that questions in these interviews may provide me with a different perspective on situations which occurred in my past relationships. I understand that I do not have to answer any question that bothers me. A list of resources is being provided which includes agencies that are either sliding fee scale or private pay/insurance. Should I decide to talk to someone I realize I can use the list of agencies or therapists provided to me as a way to seek out resources I may need. Ms. Morse is not responsible for the cost of sessions should I decide to seek out a therapist. If I am already working with a therapist I know that I can talk with that person about issues that come from questions that are asked.

5. Since I am no longer in the emotionally abusive relationship and a pseudonym will be used, I understand the risk that my former partner may become aware of my participation is extremely limited. I understand that because I am reviewing past difficult emotional events there is some possibility I may experience some emotional discomfort. I understand that at any time I may request a short break, request that the recorder be turned off, or if this is causing too great a discomfort that the interview can be discontinued. I understand that I will be receiving referrals for therapists at the end of the first interview. I understand that I would be responsible for any costs of therapy. If I think I need to, I can also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Patricia Bell-Scott, Ph.D. at 542-4902. I understand that if I have not been truthful about no longer being in an emotionally abusive relationship the researcher may terminate my participation. I understand that if the researcher has concerns about the level of emotional discomfort I appear to be experiencing, we will discuss this and determine if we need to take a break or discontinue.

6. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. I have been given the opportunity of choosing a pseudonym by the investigator, Melissa Morse, at the beginning of the study to be used in place of my real name. The pseudonym will be used during data collection, data analysis, and in any published material which may result from this study.

7. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Participant

Date

Investigator

Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR.

Research at The University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Institutional Review Board; Office of V.P. for Research; The University of Georgia; 604A Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514.

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW GUIDE I

Demographics

Age

Race/ethnicity

Current relationship status

Occupation

Income (give in \$5000 blocks)

0-\$5,000; \$5,000-10,000; 10,000-15,000; 15,000-20,000;

and so on through 95,000-100,000; over 100,000

Relationship History

1. How many romantic, intimate relationships have you been involved in since you first began dating?
2. Which ones were the most serious?
3. How long did each last?
4. What level of commitment did each reach?
5. How quickly did it reach that point?
6. How did each relationship end? Who ended each relationship and how?
7. Approximately how much time was there between each relationship? (Time when you were not involved in a relationship.)

Emotional Abuse Questions

1. If someone told you that they had been emotionally abused, what would this mean to you?
2. Have you ever experienced an incident that you would identify as emotional abuse in any of your relationships?
3. What types of emotional abuse did you experience? (*Show list of behaviors after she has given some and ask if there are any that apply that she had not mentioned. Ask if there are any others not on the list but that she now remembers.*)
4. Did you identify the behavior as abusive while you were in the relationship? If not, when did you do so?
5. How has your view of what constitutes emotional abuse changed over time?
6. Was the emotional abuse continuous or episodic?
7. If there was emotional abuse in more than one relationship, how did your response to the abuse change over time and throughout your relationship?
8. How did these abusive actions affect the relationship(s) in which they occurred over the course of the relationship.
9. Did you ever act in an emotionally abusive way to any of your partners?

Checklist of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors

Did your partner ever:

- belittle you
- yell at you
- call you names
- criticize you
- isolate you from family & friends
- monitor your time and activities
- attempt to restrict resources such as the phone or finances
- interfere with opportunities (job, medical care, education)
- accuse you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her
- throw objects, not necessarily at you
- discount you
- negate your feelings or ideas
- verbally attack you
- have unrealistic expectations
- direct dominating behaviors towards you
- humiliate you in front of people
- say negative things about you sexually
- make excessive sexual demands
- order you around
- sulk
- withhold affection
- ignore you
- slam objects or doors
- ridicule you
- express disgust toward you
- threaten to abandon you either physically or emotionally
- express excessive jealousy
- threaten your life, the life of children, pets, or family
- threaten your property
- abuse your children, pets or parents
- involve you in illegal activity
- label you in a negative way
- drive recklessly to punish or scare you
- interrupt your sleeping or eating habits
- withhold sex
- blame you for his/her problems

examples taken from the following sources: Chang (1996), Loring (1994), and Tolman (1989)

APPENDIX H
INTERVIEW GUIDE II

1. What impact did the abuse you were experiencing have on your perception of yourself?
2. How did you perceive yourself after the relationship ended?
3. How do you perceive yourself now?
4. What type of emotional abuse affected you the most? The least?
5. What kind of support did you receive from family and friends regarding the abuse?
6. What is your view on why the abuse occurred and continued?
7. How has your view of why the abuse occurred changed over time?
8. Looking back over your relationships and your experiences, what have you learned about yourself?
9. What personal strengths helped you deal with the effects of the emotional abuse?
10. What has helped you most in moving beyond the abuse?

APPENDIX I

LIST OF COUNSELING RESOURCES IN THE ATHENS AREA

This is a list of counseling/therapy resources. Sometimes talking about past difficult circumstances can cause some emotional discomfort. If you are not already working with a therapist, here is a list of some of the resources in this area. This is **only a partial list** of the resources in this area. There are many other excellent counselors and therapists listed in the phone book who also provide services. Melissa Morse is not responsible for the cost of any counseling or therapy.

Family Counseling Services, Inc.
1435 Oglethorpe Ave.
Athens, GA 30606
706-549-7755

This agency has a sliding-fee scale for therapy fees provided through support from the United Way. In addition, some of the therapists at this agency are covered by insurance providers. You can call to find out who may be covered under your plan.

Beth Boatman, M.S.	Charlie Cook, L.P.C.
Tim Hinkle, L.P.C.	John Lee, L.C.S.W.
Teddy Kemp, L.C.S.W., L.M.F.T.	Cindy McFadden, M.S.
Paul Nelson, L.C.S.W.	Chris Olson, L.P.C.
Jane Peach, L.M.S.W.	Mark Pentecost, L.P.C.
Aline Robolin, L.P.C.	Sally Speed, L.C.S.W.
Peggy Wallace, C.A.C.	Kathy Young, Ph.D.

The following people are in private practice. They are providers for many insurance plans but also take private pay. This, again, is only a partial list. There are many other excellent therapists listed in the phone book.

Anne Edens, Psy. D.	552-0400
Patricia Johnson, L.C.S.W., L.M.F.T.	208-0101
Claire Scott, Ph.D., L.P.C. (practices in Watkinsville & Atlanta but can be contacted through 549-7755)	
Sherryl Richier, L.P.C.	613-2799

Two additional numbers to be aware of are:

Project Safe (shelter for women experiencing domestic violence)	543-3331
Sexual Assault Center of Northeast Georgia	353-1912

APPENDIX J

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY MARY

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Mary
Belittles you	x
Yells at you	x
Calls you names	x
Criticizes you	x
Isolates you from family and friends	x
Monitors your time and activities	x
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	x
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	x
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	x
Discounts you	x
Negates your feelings or ideas	x
Verbally attacks you	x
Has unrealistic expectations	x
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	x
Humiliates you in front of people	
Says negative things about you sexually	
Makes excessive sexual demands	x
Orders you around	x
Sulks	x
Withholds affection	x
Ignores you	x
Slams objects or doors	
Ridicules you	
Expresses disgust toward you	x
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	x
Expresses excessive jealousy	x
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	x
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	x
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	x
Withholds sex	
Blames you for his/her problems	x

APPENDIX K

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY ALICE

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Alice
Belittles you	x
Yells at you	x
Calls you names	x
Criticizes you	x
Isolates you from family and friends	
Monitors your time and activities	
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	x
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	
Discounts you	x
Negates your feelings or ideas	x
Verbally attacks you	x
Has unrealistic expectations	x
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	
Humiliates you in front of people	
Says negative things about you sexually	x
Makes excessive sexual demands	
Orders you around	
Sulks	x
Withholds affection	x
Ignores you	x
Slams objects or doors	x
Ridicules you	x
Expresses disgust toward you	
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	x
Expresses excessive jealousy	x
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	x
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	x
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	
Withholds sex	
Blames you for his/her problems	x

APPENDIX L

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY VICKI

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Vicki
Belittles you	X
Yells at you	X
Calls you names	X
Criticizes you	X
Isolates you from family and friends	X
Monitors your time and activities	X
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	X
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	X
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	X
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	X
Discounts you	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	
Verbally attacks you	X
Has unrealistic expectations	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X
Humiliates you in front of people	X
Says negative things about you sexually	X
Makes excessive sexual demands	X
Orders you around	X
Sulks	X
Withholds affection	X
Ignores you	X
Slams objects or doors	X
Ridicules you	X
Expresses disgust toward you	
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	X
Expresses excessive jealousy	X
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	
Threatens your property	X
Abuses your children, pets or parents	X
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	X
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	X
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	X
Withholds sex	X
Blames you for his/her problems	X

APPENDIX M

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY ELIZA

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Eliza
Belittles you	X
Yells at you	
Calls you names	
Criticizes you	X
Isolates you from family and friends	X
Monitors your time and activities	X
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	X
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	X
Discounts you	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	X
Verbally attacks you	
Has unrealistic expectations	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X
Humiliates you in front of people	
Says negative things about you sexually	X
Makes excessive sexual demands	X
Orders you around	
Sulks	X
Withholds affection	X
Ignores you	
Slams objects or doors	
Ridicules you	
Expresses disgust toward you	
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	X
Expresses excessive jealousy	X
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	X
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	X
Withholds sex	
Blames you for his/her problems	X

APPENDIX N

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY BECKA

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Becka
Belittles you	X
Yells at you	X
Calls you names	
Criticizes you	X
Isolates you from family and friends	X
Monitors your time and activities	
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	X
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	X
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	X
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	
Discounts you	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	X
Verbally attacks you	X
Has unrealistic expectations	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X
Humiliates you in front of people	X
Says negative things about you sexually	
Makes excessive sexual demands	X
Orders you around	X
Sulks	X
Withholds affection	X
Ignores you	X
Slams objects or doors	
Ridicules you	
Expresses disgust toward you	X
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	
Expresses excessive jealousy	X
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	X
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	X
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	X
Withholds sex	
Blames you for his/her problems	X

APPENDIX O

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY JORDAN

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Jordan
Belittles you	X
Yells at you	X
Calls you names	X
Criticizes you	X
Isolates you from family and friends	
Monitors your time and activities	X
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	X
Discounts you	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	X
Verbally attacks you	X
Has unrealistic expectations	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X
Humiliates you in front of people	X
Says negative things about you sexually	
Makes excessive sexual demands	X
Orders you around	X
Sulks	
Withholds affection	X
Ignores you	X
Slams objects or doors	X
Ridicules you	X
Expresses disgust toward you	
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	X
Expresses excessive jealousy	X
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	
Involves you in illegal activity	
Labels you in a negative way	X
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	X
Withholds sex	X
Blames you for his/her problems	

APPENDIX P

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS EXPERIENCED BY LORI

Types of Emotionally Abusive Behaviors	Lori
Belittles you	X
Yells at you	X
Calls you names	X
Criticizes you	X
Isolates you from family and friends	X
Monitors your time and activities	
Attempts to restrict resources such as the phone or finances	X
Interferes with opportunities (job, medical care, education)	
Accuses you of repeatedly and purposefully doing hurtful behaviors directed at him/her	X
Throws objects, not necessarily at you	
Discounts you	X
Negates your feelings or ideas	X
Verbally attacks you	X
Has unrealistic expectations	X
Directs dominating behaviors towards you	X
Humiliates you in front of people	X
Says negative things about you sexually	X
Makes excessive sexual demands	X
Orders you around	X
Sulks	
Withholds affection	
Ignores you	
Slams objects or doors	
Ridicules you	X
Expresses disgust toward you	X
Threatens to abandon you either physically or emotionally	X
Expresses excessive jealousy	
Threatens your life, the life of children, pets, or family	X
Threatens your property	
Abuses your children, pets or parents	X
Involves you in illegal activity	X
Labels you in a negative way	X
Drives recklessly to punish or scare you	X
Interrupts your sleeping or eating habits	X
Withholds sex	
Blames you for his/her problems	X