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Public Narratives of Domestic Violence: Giving a Public Face to Personal Transformations

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PUBLIC NARRATIVES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:
GIVING A PUBLIC FACE TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

by

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B.A. Oakland University, 1976
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A thesis submitted to the
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This thesis entitled:
Public Narrative of Domestic Violence:
Giving a Public Face to Personal Transformations
written by Christine M. Courtade Hirsch
has been approved for the Department of Communication

Gerard A. Hauser

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Cindy White

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The final copy of the thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
ABSTRACT

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Public Narratives Of Domestic Violence: Giving A Public Face To Personal Transformations
Thesis directed by Professor Gerard A. Hauser, Department of Communication Keywords: Rhetoric, Narratives, Domestic Violence, Publics Theory, Vernacular Discourse, Public Problems, Institutional Voice, Boulder County Safehouse

The boundary between public and private is a contested area. What occurs "behind closed doors" is considered personal business, protected and confidential, as opposed to that which is "fit for public" viewing and general discussion. This becomes particularly salient when the origin of a problem, in this case domestic violence, is in the shuttered realm of the private, yet deemed by some to be worthy of, and requiring, public remediation. This study looks at the evolution of "domestic violence" as a public problem, through rhetorical analysis of narratives from three representative texts. Gusfield tells us that in order for an issue to become a public problem it must have an owner, who assigns causal and political responsibility; it must be deemed real (possessing facticity) and remediable; and it must be seen as a moral responsibility of the individual member of society. Issue owners are viewed as able to speak authoritatively on the topic; they frame the issue, define the boundaries, assign blame and demand resolution. In this study, a loose coalition of feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence, and a local safehouse (domestic violence outreach/advocacy agency and shelter), are seen to assert ownership of the issue of domestic
violence. This study examines how narratives are used to make arguments about the mental state of victims, to personalize and humanize women survivors, and as an instrument of institutional voice as Boulder County Safehouse attempts to redefine domestic violence into a matter of social justice. During the course of the evolution of a public problem, narratives are also used to make what Hauser would label *vernacular* appeals for localized publics formation, and as suasive tools to call publics to personal ownership of the problem, and to moral action. Finally, the attempt to redefine domestic violence as a social justice issue illustrates the attempt by an institution to retain and extend control over a public problem, as Boulder County Safehouse educational outreach continues to advance a narrative calling for publics formation and action.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved Grams, Ithalia Ele(a)na Marie Scala Trevisan (a.k.a. “Nana”), in deepest appreciation of her steadfast belief and unconditional love; and to my daughters, Amy Elizabeth Joy Hirsch, and Kathryn Eleana Rose Courtney, for more of the same. You are the lights in my sky, day or night.

I am deeply grateful to the countless people who contributed to my academic development. Among family and friends who so patiently and generously shared their time and space and grounded us through the process, I thank Clay Van Hoeven and James Gardner of Western Michigan University who were the first to encourage me to pursue a Ph.D. and its first and only defense. I also thank the many who helped shape and guide me: the Grams and Sally Deneen who instilled the belief that I could make a difference; my very first instructor at the University of Colorado, who showed me how to serve in that role.

I remain conscious that I had the good fortune to be mentored by Cindy White who was more than generous in sharing her wisdom and equitable expectations. Her support and trust help form my view of the academic and professional role of an educator, mentor, and scholar as well as the need to emulate Robert Byrd’s communication theory but also a valuable colleague and possessor of an all-too-undervalued dry wit that made classes a joy. Brenda J. Alper is not only a model but a possible replacement that she provided process and empathetic support when I was much needed it and
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CHAPTER ONE
THE ISSUE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Problem and Review of Literature

Issues of "Public" and "Private"

"Public" and "private" are terms that, as members of the general populace and as scholars, we encounter almost daily in conversation and in text. They are indeed so ubiquitous that we rarely stop to define them, yet we accept a rather general consensus: that "public" is that which can readily be seen and talked about (public affairs, public consensus, public opinion, public knowledge), while "private" is that which is behind closed doors, of concern to family members, held to be sacred and/or secret: not for "public" consumption (private relationships between family members, what we say around our dinner table ["not for public broadcast"], what we "really think" about people, places and things).

In some cases, the nature of the public has defined the private, rather by default: the Aristotelian public was the realm of the political, central to democracy and rule by law; the Arendtian public is the realm where social life exists. A Habermassian public sphere is where bourgeois citizens gathered to (rationally) decide issues of importance. Voice is the instrument of politics and publics. To be in public is to be seen --- and heard. That leaves the private
realm rather murky. It is the realm of interpersonal relationships, intimacy, emotions, and pain, or that which is, by definition or default, “not public.”

This somewhat arbitrary but very real distinction has both personal and public ramifications. In order for a problem to be mediated, it must be voiced. Rhetoric tells us that if it cannot be communicated, it does not have intersubjective existence and, therefore, it cannot be resolved. When the problem is of significant scope that it requires socio-political remediation, there must be a forum to voice the issue, an audience or public called into existence to deliberate, to present reasoned, public, moral arguments. What if the origin --- and some might argue the rightful “home” --- of the issue is in the private realm? That question is at the heart of my research.

How does a private issue become a public concern? How does a group, or agency, or segment of the population, attempt to push “private” problems, which arise behind closed doors in that most private of private places, the home, into the public view? How do they act, collectively and individually, to rhetorically construct a meaning which serves to identify and label, to socially construct and name, a problem which may redraw the boundary between public and private?

Our society has a history of recognizing private actions that receive public sanctions, including, but not limited to: abortion, drinking and driving, “recreational” drug usage, child abuse, regulation of sexual behavior (incest, prostitution), and domestic violence. Behind every “private” problem that requires “public” response (often in terms of intervention or active sanction) is
a history of individuals or groups who attempt to “frame” the issue by socially (rhetorically) constructing it as a problem which, even though it may take place behind closed doors, out of public view, nevertheless is of such consequence to society that it requires public remediation. Those who attempt to “own,” “define” the problem, and assign causality or blame, make rhetorical choices (Gusfield, 1981). Of a range of possible rhetorical constructions of the problem, some are highlighted and others ignored. There may be contestation, even between those who seem to be on the “same side,” over the presentation of the problem.

**Attempts to Define the Issue**

Domestic violence remains such a contested problem. On the one hand, most rational adults would not hesitate to agree that battery is against the law and should be punished, whether that battery occurs in the neighborhood bar, or the neighbor’s house (although those same rational adults would probably agree that battery in public, with witnesses who may be viewed as “disinterested” is substantially easier to punish than battery that occurs in a private residence, without “disinterested” witnesses, and between partners who have an intimate history). Legally, we agree that, barring mitigating factors like self defense, it is unacceptable to beat or batter another human being.

Numerous factors exist which complicate a simplistic definition of domestic violence. The term itself is a symbolic, hence rhetorical, construction, subject to contested meanings. Feminist advocates have long
called for the term to be “spousal abuse” or “spousal battery” contending that 1) “domestic” is too closely related to “domesticated” thus rendering the term rather tame and harmless, and that 2) “violence” does not adequately cover the spectrum of behaviors that involve power, control, domination and intimidation, any and all of which are harmful, almost all of which are directed at dependent and more powerless individuals, usually women and children.

Also of interest and concern are the symbolic and consummatory physical ways in which violence is enacted. On the one hand, there is general social consent that we need to stop physical violence against women. However, we do not have a social consensus on what domestic violence is and on how we respond to forms that don’t allow the victim to have protection. For example, domestic violence does not equal battery: if it were battery, it would not necessarily require another whole literature and debate. What makes domestic violence arguably more than battery? Obviously, the location and relationship: “domestic” implies within the home, and the relationship is between intimates, non-strangers. Within the home and family situation, there are bonds held almost sacred: parental, spousal, sibling, emotional bonds that carry weight and responsibility. Physical violence threatens or ruptures those bonds, bonds based upon affection and trust, in a way that is not present in a roundhouse at Joe’s Bar. Thus there is an inherent moral dimension to the problem involving the breaking of bonds that extend beyond “mere” legal sanctions or conventions.
Further complicating the attempt at resolution is that dimension of the problem which involves the negotiated, hence rhetorical, definition of the relationship between batterer and victim, and their use of a term we, as members of the general public, accept as commonly understood: "love." Domestic violence, by definition, does not take place between strangers on the street corner. It is between relational partners, adults who have apparently chosen to engage in intimate relationships of love and trust. Terms like "love" and "trust" are not usually common fixtures in political and legal public forums: they are of the realm of the personal and the emotional. Moreover, "love" and "trust" are not "tables" and "chairs": they are far more abstract symbolic, social constructions. Like "relationships," they are negotiated, perhaps even contested terms. If you ask almost any battered spouse, they will respond in all earnestness that they "love" their batterer, and are sure that the batterer "loves" them. The "victimless prosecution" of domestic violence enacted in many states, wherein the state can prosecute without the active testimony and support of the victim, is evidence of an attempt to remedy the seemingly paradoxical construction of love and violence coexisting in a way that seems incomprehensible to those not involved.

There is also serious contention over the definition of "violence." Boulder County Safehouse, an organization serving women and children who are seeking escape from situations involving domestic violence, offers a view of "violence" that broadens the definition to include psychological, not merely
physical, harm or threat. Safehouse contends that domestic violence is "any physical or psychological harm that is used to maintain power or control over another person with whom an intimate relationship is shared — regardless of their legal status" (Safehouse, 1996). Thus the symbolic enactment of violence, (e.g. raised voices, emotional battery in the form of criticism and belittlement, isolation from support systems, destruction of inanimate but valued objects, threats of destruction to objects or others, unwanted sexual contact) becomes part of a continuum of which physical battery is a form of culmination, but not necessarily the most egregious emotional, psychological, or spiritual harm. Moreover, there is increasing documentation that children who witness (even the symbolic enactment of) violence may grow up to become the batterers of the next generation. How do we, as a society, protect victims from emotional, spiritual, psychological "violence"?

Thus, while most will agree that "domestic violence" is "bad." there still remains an active, rhetorical attempt to challenge the definition of the problem, to negotiate the meanings of the terms, to reexamine the scope and social construction of "public" problems and to present --- re-present --- the face of the victim.

**Domestic Violence as a Social Problem**

Domestic violence is arguably one of the most important social issues of the twentieth century. Tragically, it is of particular interest to women: According to Rennison & Welchans, (2000) "In 1998, women were nearly three out of four victims of the 1,830 murders attributable to intimate..."
partners." Further, they point out, "Estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) indicate that in 1998 about 1 million violent crimes were committed against persons by their current or former spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends. Such crimes, termed intimate partner violence, are committed primarily against women. About 85% of victimizations by intimate partners in 1998, about 876,340, were against women" (p. 2).

Jones tells us damage to women is severe:

untold numbers of women suffer permanent injuries -- brain damage, blindness, deafness, speech loss through laryngeal damage, disfigurement and mutilation, damage to or loss of internal organs, paralysis, sterility, and so on. Countless pregnant women miscarry as a result of beatings, and countless birth defects and abnormalities can be attributed to battery of the mother during pregnancy. So many battered women have been infected with HIV by batterers who force them into unprotected sex, in some cases deliberately to prevent their having sex with other men, that the National Centers for Disease Control have identified a direct link between battering and the spread of HIV and AIDS among women. And every day at least four women die violently at the hands of men who profess to love them" (Jones, 1994, p. 87)

Domestic violence also impacts families. (Rennison & Welchans, 2000): "About 4 of 10 female victims of intimate partner violence lived in households with children under age 12". The consequences to those children is equally chilling:

Uncounted millions of children live in households dominated by violent men. Millions of children see and hear their mothers beaten repeatedly, a traumatic experience that many experts regard as in itself a form of child abuse. Some studies suggest that children who witness battering may suffer long-term consequences; both as children and as adults they may be particularly anxious, depressed, or aggressive (Jones, 1994,p. 84)
The costs extend beyond the families to the economy. Jones tells us that...

...federal officials estimate that "domestic violence" costs U.S. firms four billion dollars a year in lower productivity, staff turnover, absenteeism, and excessive use of medical benefits. One New York City study of fifty battered women revealed that half of them missed at least three work days a month because of abuse, while 64 percent were late for work, and more than three-fourths of them used company time and company phones to call friends, counselors, physicians, and lawyers they didn't dare call from home. As surgeon general, C. Everett Koop labeled the "epidemic" of battering a leading national health problem, and pointed out the costs to hospital emergency services, public health, and mental health facilities. (1994 p. 12)

As a report by the Council of Mayors (1999) concludes, the costs, ultimately are borne by society as a whole: "Among cities in a recent survey, 57 percent identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness" (Mayors, 1999).

Four Key Research Perspectives

While few will disagree that domestic violence is a social problem with far-reaching affects, the "how" and "why" of the problem are met with different answers from scholars, each seeking to contribute a means of analysis and a lens for viewing the problem. Four of these perspectives are especially important to this study: the feminist perspective, with its focus on, and concern with, access, power, voice and control; public ownership of problems, especially contestation for formation and control of the issue; narratives as they present public arguments; and a rhetorical understanding of the public sphere.
Many feminists are looking at this challenge of representation and resolution from the perspective of power relations. Feminists, especially liberal feminists, view domestic violence as a result of violations of individual rights, while other feminists view it as a result of a patriarchal system which allows women and children to be possessions of the male. The male has the "right", in some cases the "duty" to "control" the behavior(s) of his family. Most feminists, however, would be united in their concern over systemic social forces that impact individual women and children. By definition, feminists would be involved in ongoing social discourse around the issue of voice, access, and power imbalances which impact marginalized populations, specifically women, but often including women's dependents and support systems.

Another way to view domestic violence is to see it as a matter of public ownership of a problem (Gusfield, 1981). Issues coming into the public are brought forward and held up to public scrutiny by those who claim ownership of the issue and assign blame for the existence of the exigence. Those who succeed in establishing and claiming ownership are accorded rights, responsibilities, power and access unavailable to contestants -- other individuals or groups -- who would argue for a different representation or delineation of the issue. Thus ownership has material consequences, as does failure to establish public perception of authority over an issue.

Yet another way the issue is framed is in terms of "stories:" narratives are presented as argument and proof of the real existence of a problem.
Fisher (1980; 1984; 1985a; 1985b; 1988) and Weal (1985) tell of the force of public moral arguments framed as narratives. While Fisher's Narrative Paradigm has been subject to criticism, scholars from psychology, sociology, philosophy, law, and communication have argued convincingly for the critical importance of narratives as worthy vessels for illustrating worldviews, framing and creating political and social reality, and not least, presenting compelling arguments.

The issue of domestic violence can also be framed as one of access to a public sphere. Habermas (1989, 1995; 1992), credited with labeling the bourgeois public sphere, and Fraser (1989, 1990) who named the subaltern counter public, gave birth to the view of a public whose task is to provide for the rational presentation of ideas to determine proper political action, and a counterpublic called into being in opposition to exclusionary practices of that larger public sphere. Hauser (1999) posits the existence of a reticulate public sphere, contested and open to the influence of vernacular voices, yet still focused on public judgment and discursive action. While interested parties, often personally and politically motivated (e.g. feminists) contest for the right to frame and present the issue (as publicly acknowledged "owners" of the problem), and while narratives are often their argumentative vehicle of choice for delivering their appeals, it remains up to an energized public to direct and demand social action to remediate the issue.

This study stands at the meeting of those four threads: it is a rhetorical analysis of the way narratives (as an inherently rhetorical construct) are used
by feminists and victims’ advocates, survivors of domestic violence, and
spokespersons for agencies committed to serving victims of domestic
violence, to formulate the rhetorical construction of domestic violence as a
“problem.” Moreover, these narratives must gain purchase in a public/public
sphere, thus an analysis of those narratives which have “made it” into a public
forum assumes greater importance.

**Dimensions of Domestic Violence: Presentations in Scholarly Research**

Whatever the theoretical or scholarly bent, domestic violence is a
problem that resists easy answers. Scholarly research tends to divide the
discussion logically, into specific fields of study, usually involving at least four
dimensions: legal, medical, social, and communicative. Each dimension has
its own focus of concern, its own language to describe the phenomenon. A
strong argument could be made that each field socially, through discourse,
constructs the reality of domestic violence as it enters or overlaps their field of
knowledge, experience, and expertise. To a legal mind, domestic violence is
a matter of torts, of criminal process, of efficacy, of legally valid evidence.
Legal journals debate issues such as the efficacy of restraining orders (Nallin,
2001), whether mandatory reporting of domestic violence helps or hinders
victims (Dare, 2000); whether hearsay is acceptable as evidence (Hudders,
2000), and whether homeowner’s insurance covers domestic violence injuries
(Journal, 2001).

The medical dimension constructs domestic violence as a physical
problem: how do we recognize and treat battery in a patient? Presented with
physical injuries, what is the appropriate response? Medical journals concentrate on screening for injuries (Cole, 2000; Diloreto, 2001; Preboth, 2000; Salornhut, 2000); interventions (Carpenito, 2001; Feldhaus, 2001; Gerbert et al., 2000; Jensen, 2000; Phelps, 2000); and the value of mandatory reporting of suspected domestic violence injuries (Rodriguez, McLoughlin, Nah, & Campbell, 2001; Sachs & Rodriguez, 2000).

Those who focus on the “social” dimension construct domestic violence as a phenomenon which impacts society and which is, in turn, impacted by the social system. It is a product of relationships and, as such, might be isolated and treated. Sociologists study the context of abusive relationships (Lloyd & Emery, 2000) and even how football games impact domestic violence (Sachs & Chu, 2000). Social workers are concerned with the way the welfare/governmental/organizational system works (Magen, Conroy, & Del Tufo, 2000; Shamai, 2000), the way marital violence impacts children (Chamberlain, 2001; Lee, 2001; Mills et al., 2000) and whether mediation is successful in cases of domestic violence (Imbrogno & Imbrogno, 2000).

The communicative dimension of the problem is of particular interest to rhetoricians since humans construct the richness and complexity of issues and problems through language and symbol systems. Communication scholars traditionally have looked at the problem as a relational one (Baxter & Bullis, 1986); in terms of a series of communication traits (e.g. "verbal
aggressiveness") (Infante & Wrigley, 1986); and as a result or function of message design (Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Vangelisti, 1994).

Personal narratives have been studied, often in terms of self definition (Shaw, 1997). There are accounts of narratives in relation to domestic violence, but most are narratives about specific battering incidents from women usually identified as victims. Again, the focus is on the interpersonal relational level of analysis and the analysis is of "accounts" rather than a rhetorical focus on "narratives" (Adams, Towns, & Gavey, 1995; Rudd, Dobos, Vogl-Bauer, & Beatty, 1997; Stamp & Sabourin, 1995).

Moreover, many of the narratives studied presume narratives to be data or evidence rather than arguments. Narratives, especially narratives-as-accounts, limit narrative to what might more classically be thought of as narratio: that which sets the scene. Narratives can unarguably function as evidence that a particular condition exists: stories told by battered women provide evidence that domestic violence is "real," just as witness testimony can be used to validate claims about guilt or innocence. This study attempts to address how narratives present "more" than evidence: how narratives are used to construct a particular worldview of an issue, presented as a public call to action.

What is missing in previous communication research studies is precisely what this study offers: a focus on the public nature and contested character of issue formation; the role that narratives play as presenting arguments about the shape and dimension of domestic violence and
narrative's role in calling a public to action; and the presence – or lack – of voices of women victims: who tells their stories?

**The Rhetorical Nature Of Narratives**

This noticeable lack of focus on narratives in terms of their rhetorical characteristics is what this study attempts to address. The rhetoric of narrative includes emplotment (temporal sequencing and causation), character (actors with varying degrees of agency), scene, narrator and voice. Narratives arise in response to a rift in the fabric of (accepted) reality: they are an answer and a re-presentation of reality. Because narratives are so intrinsically rhetorical, as addressed presentations of reality offered to the reader/listener to explain a trouble (or in Bitzer's terms, to respond to an exigence) they are especially germane to a study of how a problem, in this case domestic violence, is constituted. Narratives provide answers, and those answers frame domestic violence into a public problem of a certain sort.

There are a range of potential narratives to answer the question(s) posed by domestic violence, yet only certain narratives are presented in public forums, are offered as evidence by interested social actors, have traction as "[truly] reflective" of social reality. Why those narratives? What picture do they draw? What stories are not present? Who tells the tales? Who owns the issue? Are the stories all the same? Do they construct a unified picture of domestic violence, or are there differences between the stories presented by feminist advocates, by survivors, and by agencies? To what extent do these narratives seem to clash, contradict or support the
overarching construction of "domestic violence?" How do stories of "helpless victim" support or undermine narratives of "survivor"? Are there stories of women who return to abusers? How would a story like that impact competing narratives of survivors as women who leave abusers? How do the narratives of these key "players" respond to contradictory narratives [for example, counselors who assert that domestic violence is not just about patriarchal power and control: it is about the batterer’s feelings of powerlessness and lack of control]? There are many intriguing questions that need to be asked, and strategies that call for analysis.

[Further] Problematizing the Problem

Again, domestic violence seems to be a clear cut problem: Battery is wrong. Agreed. No discussion or negotiation: let’s go home. However, the ongoing and decisive struggle is to construct a view of domestic violence that goes beyond “mere” physical battery, acknowledging the existence of complex factors. Those actively seeking to change the social conception of domestic violence see, and argue that, battery is one stop on a continuum of harm that seriously impacts individuals and can have grave repercussions for a most vulnerable population: children. Moreover, child witnesses to "violence" are more likely to become the abusers of tomorrow, thus participating in a regenerating nightmare of violence begetting violence, and increasing the costs to society. Consider a few scenarios:

• Pat and Terry have been living together for 6 years. Like any couple, they disagree, sometimes volubly. Terry’s mother taught Terry an anger
management tool: keep a set of inexpensive dishes around the house, and when your temper threatens to get out of control, break one of those dishes: your anger is diffused and no harm done. Neighbors hear Pat and Terry yelling, followed by the sound of breaking dishes. Is this domestic violence?

- What if *Pat* is breaking *Terry's* dishes and yelling that "you could be next"?
- What if Pat and Terry have young children who witness the threats?
- What if the children are alarmed and crying, or yelling "Stop it! Stop it!"
- What if Pat and Terry are lesbian, or gay males?
- What if Terry is a male and Pat is the female breadwinner?
- What if Pat and Terry have no children? Is there then no harm?
- What if Pat and Terry have been drinking?

- What if Terry is a woman whose husband, Pat, belittles her regularly, chipping away at her self-esteem and causing her to question her ability to parent, or even to function as a socially responsible adult? Pat tells Terry that no one else could ever care for her; that he is the only one who really loves her; that if she ever should leave, she would have no money, no assets; that he would fight her for custody of the children. Terry tells you of the things Pat says, nasty things that, in your opinion, no caring person would say to another. You tell Terry to leave him. But Terry has no money. She can't find a job that pays above minimum wage, and child care costs would soon eat that up. Her children would suffer. She has no
credit rating, no way to purchase a vehicle. So she goes back. The next


time she tells you about Pat, you tell her, gently, "Terry, we've discussed


this. You know what I think you should do." The violence may escalate,


but Pat is always sorry afterwards. He loves her. She tells you again.


You again respond "Why don't you leave? There are shelters..." Soon

Terry quits telling you about Pat. She is silenced. She is isolated. She
doubts her abilities and her sanity, after all, the question is "Why don't you
leave?" and not "Why isn't Pat told to change his behavior?" Is this harm?
Is this violence? For the sake of their children, do we intervene? How do
we treat Terry? As a victim? As incompetent to care for her children? Do
we take the children away from Terry? Does Pat’s behavior escape
censure?

Questions and narratives very like the Pat and Terry scenario are
representative of the complexity and contestation surrounding the naming and
definition of the problem of domestic violence. It is the attempts to address
such concerns, and the public, rhetorical struggle for the ownership and
definition of this complex problem that is central to this project.

Before moving to discuss the research question, some explanation of
terminology and theoretical perspectives is required.

Definition Of Terms

A more detailed description of publics theory will follow, however,
consistent with Hauser (1999), distinctions will be made between Public
Sphere (the/an "undifferentiated public domain in which civic conversation, in
general, occurs” [p. 40]), and public spheres, which refer to multiple arenas, multiple spheres, multiple sites of public discourse and publics formation. Moreover, common usage of terms public and private will remain, public reflecting life lived in Arendt’s public realm, as opposed to the private realm of the individual home, family, and life “behind closed doors.”

Narratives will be defined as stories using Bruner’s (1990) adaptation of Burke’s pentad: stories must contain Agent, Action, Goal, Setting, Instrument, and Trouble. In addition, stories will be viewed as inherently emplotted, plot containing, per Martin (1986) “a combination of temporal succession and causality” (p. 40).

**A Theoretical Framework**

This study is a rhetorical analysis of narratives that have found their way into “the public.” Their existence and function is predicated upon an understanding of what “public” means: how “public” is different from “private,” what it means to “be” in the public, and what “a public” or “the public” has to offer citizens who desire remediation of social problems. To that end, a theory of public/publics/publicness is mandated. Further, since public space is almost always contested space, Gusfield’s (1981) theory of ownership of public problems will also be useful.

**On “Publics” and Publics Theory**

Habermas (1989, 1995; 1992) did a masterful job of outlining the bourgeois public sphere, which he theorized existed in opposition or tension to the private, the state and economic spheres. Fraser’s (1990) critique and
presentation of subaltern counterpublics, engaged in agonistic struggles for voice in the public realm, expands and enhances Habermas, allowing for the multiplicity of voices contesting for public attention and existence. Neither, however, took the necessary step to move from a public sphere to the notion of multiple sites of public creation, empirically verifiable and rhetorically active. That move was left to Hauser (1999).

Hauser offers many insights into how publics actually function as multiple, reticulate, contested, discursive sights for vernacular engagement in public policy debate. Four essential contributions will be of seminal importance: the inherently rhetorical and agonistic nature of publics; the concept of publics as discursively constructed and empirically verifiable entities; the fluid and reticulate nature of the publics; and the focus on vernacular discourse as representative and evidentiary.

Hauser argues for a rhetorical model of publics. This rhetorical model is nested in the lived experiences of individuals. Further, the rhetorical model; would require openness to those conditions that produce a plurality of spheres within the Public Sphere. It would focus on civil society’s lattice of spheres ... and would conceptualize publics as processes that emerge through discourse of social actors who are attempting to appropriate their own historicity... A rhetorical model of public spheres not only expects participants to have interests but regards them as essential for the exercise of prudent judgments on public problems. (1999, p.55)

Moreover, Hauser’s rhetorical model is issue (or, for purposes of this dissertation, problem) and audience-specific: “Invoking audience-specific standards that can accommodate conflicting interests suggests that good reasons are the operative basis for actual consensus” and “a rhetorical model
abandons the search for generalizable arguments. Its concern is for how the 
dialogue within any given public sphere mounts appeals that lead participants 
to understand their interests and make prudent judgments" (p. 56). Hauser 
concludes that "...a rhetorical model recognizes that civil society's defining 
conditions of interdependence and diversity require that communicative 
partners share a common reference world. Common understanding 
supplants warranted assent as the communicative norm for achieving 
reasonable mutual cooperation and toleration" (p. 56).

Not only are publics rhetorical constructions, they are identified and 
analyzed through empirical evidence: through their discursive activity:

Sensible thought about publics requires capturing their activity: how they 
construct reality by establishing and synthesizing values, forming 
opinions, acceding to positions, and cooperating through symbolic 
actions, especially discursive ones. Put differently, any given public 
exists in its publicness, which is to say in its rhetorical character (p. 33)

The fluid and reticulate nature of publics allows for contestation, for 
multiple interests engaging in discursive attempts to form judgments. It 
privileges the complexity of interests and discourses. We identify actors by 
their discursive acts, yet social actors operate in multiple forums, are often 
polyvocal, and resist reification into "a public." Rather they act, and 
these activities are often local, are often in venues other than institutional 
forums, are always issue specific, and seldom involve the entire 
populace. Rather than searching for "the public," we are well advised to 
follow Herbert Blumer's ... lead and commence with an understanding of 
developed societies as montages of publics, each one, as he has 
argued, activated as its members feel issues intersect with the 
conditions of their lives in ways that require their attention. Thus, we 
may define a public as the interdependent members of society who hold 
different opinions about a mutual problem and who seek to influence its 
resolution through discourse" (Hauser, 1999, p. 32)
Moreover, the publics are “not pregiven: publics emerge as those who are actively creating and attending to these discursive processes for publicizing opinions” (p. 33). Publics may best be seen as processes, rather than fixed bodies of committed members: “publics do not exist as entities but as processes; their collective reasoning is not defined by abstract reflection but by practical judgment; their awareness of issues is not philosophical but eventful” (p. 64).

Hauser’s move “shifts the focus of analysis from a specific, concrete political entity to activity in the public realm” (p. 33), a move which allows for flexibility that takes place in interaction. In fact, it is precisely the ability for coalitions of individuals and groups to form around issues, yet remain, in their complexity, not a reification of, or identical to, each other.

Finally, Hauser’s focus on vernacular discourse as representative and evidentiary opens the door to a wide variety of data. Radically different from a focus on oratory or “public opinion polls” as evidence of a public’s action, Hauser posits the importance of everyday, common, shared and constructed symbol systems: “we belong to a community insofar as we are able to participate in its conversations. We must acquire its vernacular language in order to share rhetorically salient meanings” (p. 67). This is especially important since, as aforementioned, common, shared understanding supplants warranted assent.

Hauser’s publics “may manifest their attention to issues through votes but just as often by exercising their buying power, demonstrations of sympathy or opposition, adornments of colored ribbons, debates in
classrooms and on factory floors, speeches on library steps or letters to the editors..." (p. 32).

Explicitly highlighting the centrality of narrative/story-telling as a social activity, a public activity, Hauser asserts "...when tradition has been shattered, we make sense of what has occurred and what we now confront by reconstructing the past in a new story that is subject to constant revision and reinterpretation as the conversational partners change" (Hauser, 1999).

Vernacular discourse allows the rhetorical action to take place in other ways than mass mediated sound bites: it allows for the very real and resonant activity that takes place in neighborhoods and on the pages of the local newspapers editorial section, involving narratives as arguments providing good reasons, allowing controversy over artwork hanging in a library to be part of the rhetorical struggle for voice and negotiation and definition and resolution.

Hauser, then, provides an admirable theoretical framework for an analysis of how private problems move into the public. His project, however, did not involve elaborating on the narrative link. Hauser’s chapter five, on “Narrative, Cultural Memory and the Appropriation of Historicity” focuses on narrative writ large, as the master narratives of a society or culture are manipulated and the resulting consequences to citizens. While acknowledging the importance of narratives to individuals, the focus is not on individual narratives, or on the narratives of individuals, as central to his argument.
Moreover Hauser, and indeed, the majority of scholars today, did not focus on narratives as representative of an organizational voice. The question in this study thus becomes how does an organization use narratives to position itself and to argue for ownership?

As is exemplified by his analysis of citizen letters to Franklin Roosevelt, Hauser used these letters to provide evidence of how average people argue. This is closer to my project, but Hauser moves in a different rhetorical direction, using letters as the method of providing good reasons, rather than studying stories offered as evidence of good reasons. This study will attempt to expand Hauser's description of vernacular voices to include narratives as a vehicle for individuals and agencies, as they attempt to rhetorically construct a problem in such a way that it demands/commands public action.

**Gusfield and Public Problems**

Studying the movement from private to public is facilitated by an examination of Gusfield (1981). Gusfield traces how drinking-driving became a public problem. He is concerned with "How...an issue or problem emerges as one with public status, as something about which 'someone ought to do something'" (p.5). He provides a vocabulary which allows us to speak about ownership of public problems:

"The concept of 'ownership of public problems' is derived from the recognition that in the arenas of public opinion and debate all groups do not have equal power, influence, and authority to define the reality of the problem. The ability to create and influence the public definition of a problem is what I refer to as 'ownership.'" (p. 10).
Ownership carries power: “At any time in a historical period there is a recognition that specific public issues are the legitimate province of specific persons, roles, and offices that can command public attention, trust, and influence. They have credibility...Owners can make claims and assertions...they are looked at and reported to by others...They possess authority in the field...They are among those who can gain the public ear” (p. 10). In order for domestic violence to be framed in a specific way, as a specific sort of problem, ownership is essential, and contested.

Gusfield also highlights the contested nature of public problems: “…the status of a phenomenon as a problem is itself often a matter of conflict as interested parties struggle to define or prevent the definition of a matter” requiring public intervention.

Gusfield theorizes the relationship between ownership of a problem, and the assignment of responsibility, causal and political. “Owners” of a problem are perceived as having the authority to assign causal responsibility, to allocate the blame for the existence of the problem ("a matter of belief or cognition, an assertion about the sequence that factually accounts for the existence of the problem" [p.23]). Owners may also attempt to assign political responsibility for addressing the problem: “…political responsibility is a matter of policy. It asserts that somebody or some office is obligated to do something about the problem, to eradicate or alleviate the harmful situation” (p. 13). In the case of domestic violence, those who attempt to own the issue (for example, feminist victim advocates) also attempt to assign causal
responsibility (domestic violence is a result of patriarchy) and political responsibility (all of society should hold perpetrators criminally and morally responsible for harm).

Lest we think ownership is not at the heart of a serious struggle, of, in some cases, life and death, Gusfield reminds us that “what happens on the public stage is made the standard of legitimacy, of what are the canons of the society. To grant acceptance to ...behavior when it emerges in the light of public reports is to create the societal rule; to generate the perception of living in a society in which such action is legitimate” (p.181). If we, as a society, accept that, for example, domestic violence is only of concern when physical battery is evidenced, how are we valuing, or more accurately, ignoring those acts whose culmination is battery, but whose collective weight provides such harm that women, and men, are trapped in a spiral that all too often ends in death, through murder and/or suicide?

Moreover, these public presentations of the issue do not spring fully formed before a pre-ordained audience. They are carried on the back of narratives and statistics – vehicles which lend credibility and shape the parameters of the issue. While there is more than adequate public discussion of the accessibility and validity of statistics as evidence or proof, this dissertation focuses on what Aristotle would label artistic proofs; specifically, the ways in which stories present (make, create, shape, serve as) arguments. Narratives describe a narrated worldview which calls an audience to see itself
within that frame, which resonates with an internal fidelity and coherence, which requires an action on the part of that audience.

Together, Hauser and Gusfield provide a theoretical framework that allows examination of narratives as public, empirical evidence of critical contestations for ownership, voice, and the rhetorical construction of a public problem.

**Statement of Research Question(s)**

This dissertation asks the question: How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse use narratives to negotiate the public/private boundary in presentations of domestic violence in the public sphere?

The research question implicitly involves the theoretical position that narratives present arguments, not merely supplemental data for arguments. Further, the question concerns the problem of the public/private distinction: Domestic violence consists of "private" acts with personal consequences that require public policy and agency for remedy. It is a question with important social consequences, which will be discussed and analyzed in Chapter Two.

There are also some closely related areas with implications for understanding the public/private boundary. They help illuminate the nature and relationships among those who attempt to control and own the issue of domestic violence, as it moves from a private issue to one requiring public remediation.
How does an agency use narrative to negotiate the boundary between public and private: Safehouse as boundary-spanner. Boulder County Safehouse is an organization committed to self-avowed feminist principles of ethics, social justice and the redress of power imbalances. The organization sponsors a shelter, and serves as a publicly recognized authority on the issue of domestic violence, offering the community an educational and referral agency on domestic violence concerns. Safehouse provides a shelter for women and children escaping situations involving domestic violence, and as such exists as a quasi-public entity, or space. Safehouse is also an organization, one which issues arguments, often in the form of narratives, claiming a public voice, vigorously attempting to engage a public audience, or, in Fraser’s (1990) terms, a subaltern counter public, around the issue of domestic violence. Further highlighting its dual role, Safehouse, as shelter, is a place where abused women flee from the isolation, the closet of the private; it is a place where women’s stories are heard and validated; where, if successful, women move from a non-rhetorical life in the private, to a public identity—where their stories can be heard. It is at once both a public and private space: women are guaranteed protection from their batterers, yet members of the public (e.g. volunteers and trainees in Boulder County Safehouse support programs) are allowed access, can meet and interact with the women and their children. The rooms are shared, the chores are shared, the resources are shared. There is no residential phone service, but a pay phone: no perpetrators can call residents, but residents can call out to make
job appointments. Privacy is a scarce commodity, and fellow residents are very often transient strangers, yet it is a "home" a dwelling place where women and children shelter from the often-nightmarish private world they fled. It is a place largely free of men: the mission statement reads: "The mission...is to provide safe shelter, support, and advocacy for battered women and their children..." (Boulder County Safehouse, 1994). The shelter is in a secret location, whose residents promise not to divulge the location. While men may enter the business office location, where meetings are held, business conducted, training offered, I have never seen a man (other than perhaps a repairman) at the shelter itself. Men may be accepted as Domestic Abuse Prevention Project Advocates, or Speaker's Bureau Presenters, but will probably not be Crisis Line Workers, or Relief Counselors.

How do advocates in the battered women's movement use narratives to negotiate the tension between individual agency and social responsibility? On the one hand, feminist ideology clearly posits that domestic violence is a result of a patriarchal social system that oppresses women (among others) and makes them so subservient to men that they become possessions or chattel who the master has the "right" or duty or obligation to discipline and control. It is a social issue. It requires and mandates, social attention, social action, and social agency. That is at the core of the strongest public presentations. On the other hand, Safehouse \textit{qua} Safehouse seems to be informed by an almost classic liberal feminist ideology: each \textit{individual} must make the changes, the stories are individual
stories, the remediation is at an individual level. "Success" stories are individual stories, and even those stories are carefully chosen. Potential residents are screened and must be judged "fit for shelter" according to established criteria and counselor's experienced recommendation, before they are allowed to enter the shelter. In some cases, a woman may be judged "not fit" or may be asked to leave the shelter for violating norms, rules and expectations. Where do these women go? Back to their abusers? Are they really talking about saving the woman on an individual level, ignoring those who refuse to accept the ideology and (sometimes literally) die? How, if at all, do they reconcile the apparent conflict: to publicly argue that it is a social problem, yet affix tremendous responsibility, on the private/individual level of the victim/survivor to change her own narrative (with the real, but extremely limited assistance of 6 weeks in shelter and job leads?). How, if at all, do they account for the ones who fade from view? Are there stories of women who go back to their abuser, get counseling, and lead "normal" lives? Is there any "happily ever after" story other than "and she left her abuser and moved on with her life?" If there were alternative "happily ever after" stories, what would that do to the other stories agencies tell? And how, if at all, do they juggle "Here is a story of a national tragedy, it is our story and our shame..." with "And Susan is a hero: here is her story..."

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1 Thus far, I have never encountered such a story. Should I, that would be noteworthy in and of itself.
More specifically, the answers to these public/private boundary questions will grow from answers to my questions that frame three important "sub issues":

1) **How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Boulder County Safehouse, use narratives to reframe a “private matter/private issue” as a public and political responsibility?**

   This question involves the use of public (narrative) arguments that domestic violence is, indeed, a matter of concern for society writ large, not a matter of “what goes on behind closed doors should remain there.” I am specifically interested the way these three groups narrate public arguments in ways that create domestic violence) as a public problem.

   I will be looking at the ways these groups 1) generate data through stories, and 2) use stories as data; 3) attempt to establish identification with the audience through narratives that place domestic violence as not “out there” but in neighborhoods and families and the “real” world experienced by “normal” people; 4) establish new relationships among the data: transforming “murder victim #127” into, not only a mom, a wife, a churchgoing, good employee, but also “your sister”, “your mother”, “your cousin.”

2) **How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Boulder County Safehouse, use narratives to**

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2 Although this study is focused on feminist advocates, and while these tend to be the both female and the majority of “visible” voices, they are not the only voices. Men can certainly advocate on behalf of victims and survivors, and many who advocate might resist being labeled “feminist”. There is no intent to imply that only feminist women can identify, care and seek to become involved. Nor is there any intent to imply that men are always perpetrators and never victims. Statistics show, however, that men are most often the perpetrators, and women most often the victims, though even that data is under contention.
resolve the issue of “invisibility” (a “voice without a face”; the non-rhetorical private vs. a life in public)? This sub-question concerns the attempt to bring forward, from the “private,” the faces of women who are victim/survivors of domestic violence. When I asked a trusted mentor “What do you have when you have a voice but no face?” he responded “An invisible [wo]man.” Invisibility is an apt metaphor for women who are victim/survivors. As Fala (1993) has theorized “the closet” as a non-rhetorical space for gay/lesbian individuals, for women who are battered, the home, the realm of the private, is a non-rhetorical space where stories are censored, reframed, and/or ignored. When stories DO make it into the public realm, they are either stories of survivors (told mostly in and around the battered women’s movement), or of victims (i.e. women who are murdered as a result of domestic violence). In public presentations, there seems to be an increasing tendency to show victim/survivor’s faces: to insert them into visibility and argue for a place in public.

Here I will be looking specifically for: 1) who “owns” the story (first person, third person – who is telling the story and claiming it to be “her” story); 2) what stories are untold (who remains silenced?); 3) identification formation (how creating an identifiable story, an identity, and a face that can be “identified with” allows victim/survivors to overcome anonymity/invisibility); 4) patterns of stories that attempt to debunk stereotypes and establish a positive identity/identification (domestic violence victim/survivors are not deviant, are not mentally ill, are not crippled emotionally which causes them to be
victimized, are not a “type” of “other”); 5) stories which provide arguments for why women take actions (murdering a batterer, leaving a relationship, staying in one); 6) instances where tellers create and reinforce the “survivor” identity.

3) How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse, use narratives to help construct a personal “survivor” identity as a counter to a “victim” identity? Again, closely related to question number two, this question concerns the stories we tell (about) ourselves. Bruner (1987) refers to the power of story as autobiography: we are, and become, the stories we tell about ourselves. To move from the position of a “victim” – (to whom things happen), to a “survivor” (a person who is capable of voice, who has agency and is capable of a public presence), is to significantly change the stories the women tell about themselves. Needless to say, stories of “I am a victim” do not have the same reception (if they are received at all), as stories of “I am a survivor.” Therefore, changing narratives is necessary (though tempting, I will refrain from arguing “which came first, the story or the change?”).

Here I am looking for: 1) women’s stories told in their own words; 2) stories involving movement and change (e.g. “I was…. I am” --- “I was a victim, I am a survivor); 3) stories told by representatives about women who “didn’t make it” – what they failed to make and what story is told for WHY they failed to make it; 4) narratives which describe “success” and how that term is used and explained; 5) narratives which are told FOR women: by whom they are told, and when; 6) gaps where stories seem to be missing,
perhaps because the subject has been silenced by her batterer (or has left the arena where stories can be told?); 7) patterns in narratives which suggest a certain picture of a "survivor" or a "victim."

There is an interesting dynamic present involving 1) the public-realm desire to use "victim" stories to publicize the (real) horror of domestic violence [the argument that domestic violence is indeed a public problem]; 2) the appearance of "survivor" stories in the public realm to (as aforementioned) give "next-door neighbor" faces to heretofore silenced/invisible women [blurring -- or spanning -- the public/private boundary]; 3) the, again real, need to empower women by helping them make the transition from "victim" to "survivor" [rewarding the transition by helping them change their personal narrative?] and giving them a public life and a public identity]. That is the dynamic/tension reflected in the three sub-issues. How are narratives being managed and presented?

Methodology

In looking at the problem of how feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Boulder County Safehouse use narratives to negotiate the public/private boundary in presentations of domestic violence in the public sphere, I will be concentrating on public presentations of narratives which attempt to reframe the issue of domestic violence as a public concern. My analysis will be rhetorical and empirical following Hauser, that is taking an "empirical attitude toward the ways publics, public spheres, and public opinion are manifested" (Hauser,
The evidentiary requirements...are tied to statements social actors advance on public problems. Evidence includes not only what can be said but what is proscribed; not only the formal statements of officials, leaders, and spokespersons or of institutional voices, such as the press, but vernacular exchanges among the actively engaged segment of society; not only institutional forums but counter- and preinstitutional public spheres where those who are not privy to official sites or are marginalized engage as publics and counterpublics in society's multilogue on issues that impact their lives. (p. 275).

**Justification of Texts**

This study begins with the assertion that domestic violence is an issue that has some import in the American society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. To that end, one goal of the study was to search for evidence present in public forums – available to concerned members of an existing or potential public – that would focus on the stories of women involved in situations of domestic violence.

Another focus was on narratives: what stories are told, of and by women, in an attempt to frame domestic violence as a problem of concern to an audience of citizen actors? Repeating an earlier observation: not all stories make it into a public forum. Not all women's voices are heard by those citizen-strangers who are called to make a decision on an issue of key significance to the woman/victim/survivor. While oral narratives are certainly valid and valuable, especially in cases involving a vulnerable,
underrepresented, marginalized or suppressed population, this particular study was not concerned with collecting those narratives, but with examining narratives that had been preserved and presented to the general public in an apparent attempt to present a particular face and voice for consideration. Two key words are presence and function: what kind of stories are present, and how are those stories use to frame the issue?

Further, since an empirical attitude demands that the search not be limited to a priori definitions of text, the desire was to sample from diverse media and types of text, texts which might indicate the expansion of the issue beyond letters to the editor or theoretical/academic texts. Again, the purpose is not to belittle letters to the editor, but rather to expand the perception of rhetorical appeals available to interested citizens. While acknowledging that there are myriad appeals, this study sought to present texts both diverse, in terms of their form, and representational, as they met the criteria of availability and victim/survivor centered narratives. The requirement for diversity would be met through the use of a film, a book, and a variety of public documents representing an organizational voice, in this case Safehouse of Boulder County.

To that end, the question involved “Does this particular text involve stories and/or voices of women who have experienced domestic violence?” and “Is this text available to members of the general public and/or members who are attempting to form an opinion on the issue?” In short, the question originally was “What’s out there?” and, after that, “What might that indicate?”
Boulder County Safehouse is a non-profit, feminist organization in Boulder Colorado that has achieved national recognition for its outreach and educational efforts on the topic of domestic violence. As we shall see in later chapters, they are an acknowledged local "owner" of the issue, and to that end, their public communication on the issue is a key voice, as they are credited with speaking for -- and about -- the victims. Documents Safehouse has made available for general public consumption are an important textual source. Moreover, the voice they provide is also an institutional voice, informed by feminist principles. This voice allows a glimpse of an organization which spans the public/private boundary, and how narratives negotiate that boundary through the organization.

A second important text is the movie Defending Our Lives. This documentary won an Academy Award in 1994, is regularly used as a source for domestic violence educational outreach, is available in public and university libraries, and can be purchased through the internet. Receiving an Academy Award arguably places the film in the cultural mainstream. The documentary can be seen as a rhetorical attempt to contextualize domestic violence in terms of the social scope of the issue, while providing first person narrative presentations of four women convicted of murdering their abusive partners.

The final text, A Woman Like You (Anderson, 1997) is a paperback. The book's title clearly indicates an appeal to a specific audience. Anderson herself states she was motivated by the question
...what did a "battered woman" look like?...The truth is, battered women are all around us. We just don't recognize them, because they look like us. And so I began my journey with my camera to explore the "face" of domestic violence (1997, p. 1).

The book's pages consist of pictures and stories of victims/survivors of domestic abuse: a black and white portrait of a women is placed next to her paragraph-to-page-long narrative. It is first-person and immanent, with a sense that Anderson, as the photographer, records each woman's story as each photograph: simple, unadorned, real.

There are a number of fiction and non-fiction, paperback as well as hardcover books available to the public dealing with the subject of domestic violence. However, this text best met the aforementioned criteria of presenting the voices, narratives and, an unanticipated bonus, the faces of women victims. Moreover, that presentation frames the women as normal, ordinary, and "like" every other woman: in other words, it is a particular framing of the voice and face of abused women.

While not as enthralling as Anna Quindlen's (1998) New York Times bestseller Black and Blue, or Dare's (2002) Avenging Angel, Anderson has the advantage of being a work of non-fiction. There are other non-fiction books which present the pathos and fear suffered by battered women, including Jones's (1996) Women Who Kill and (2000) Next Time, She'll be Dead. There are even other books which report stories of, and from, battered women, including Weiss's (2000) Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women who Broke Free and LaViolette and Barnett's (2000) It Could Happen to Anyone: Why Battered Women Stay. In all these cases, while poignant
narratives are present, they are all mediated in such a way that they remain stories of "other." While we may indeed react to the pain and pathos as described by the author, we never lose consciousness of the fact that the author is standing between the reader and the individual woman.

Though the intellect clearly appreciates that Anderson's own (photographer's) lens separates the public from the individual woman, the text nevertheless allows a depth of identification not possible in any of the other texts mentioned.

Thus through a close examination of the texts, this dissertation studies attempts to rhetorically construct and "own" the issue of domestic violence through narrative presentations that seek to call a public into existence for the purpose of remediating a social ill.

**Preview of Chapters**

Chapter Two will involve an overview of the problem including an historical perspective; grassroots action; the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act; religious response to, and backlash against, feminist attempts to define domestic violence; a description of two primary theories offered to explain domestic battery; and a preview of Boulder County Safehouse's attempt to own the issue.

Chapter Three is centered on theoretical perspectives: public, publics theory, Gusfield's insights on the assignment of responsibility, discourse communities and the "public sphere", Hauser's contemporary public sphere, and narrative analysis.
Chapter Four begins the analysis as it describes the “pure victim” and uses the documentary *Defending Our Lives* as a text. The focus is on asserting claims and ownership, the battle for control, making the issue a public issue, and indictments of the police and court system.

Almost ten years after passage of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) the consequences of domestic violence remain severe. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 20,000 homicides in 2009 were committed by intimate partners, and homicides accounted for 34.5 percent of murders of women, while less than four percent of the four million and picture of battered woman as personalized, recognizeable, and immediate.

Chapter Five, the issue is seen as becoming more “personal.” Graham’s “Natural Procedure of Argument” is used as a backdrop to analyzing how narratives present in the text, *A Woman Like You* can be seen to articulate a worldview and picture of battered woman as personalized, recognizeable, and immediate.

Chapter Six focuses on Boulder County Safehouse, as an organization that attempts, through educational outreach, to make ownership claims. Safehouse exercises an organizational voice as it seeks to call a public into existence and to expand the definition of domestic violence to include the broader term “social justice.”

Chapter Seven advances some conclusions, calls for further research, and presents implications for publics theory and the “face” of the victim of domestic abuse.
CHAPTER TWO

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Almost ten years after passage of the 1994 federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) the consequences of domestic violence remain severe. According to the Bureau of Justice Crime Data brief, in 2000, intimate partner homicides accounted for 33.5 percent of murders of women, while less than four percent of the murders of men (retrieved 8/03 from http://endabuse.org).

Further:

Although only 572,000 reports of assaults by intimates are officially reported to federal officials each year, the most conservative estimates indicate two to four million women of all races and classes are battered each year. At least 170,000 of those violent incidents are serious enough to require hospitalization, emergency room care, or a doctor’s attention (www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html).

The damage to children remains a serious concern:

Violent juvenile offenders are four times more likely to have grown up in homes where they saw violence. Children who have witnessed violence at home are also five times more likely to commit or suffer violence when they become adults (www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html).

Additionally:

Women who are battered have more than twice the health care needs and costs than those who are never battered. Approximately 1 percent of pregnant women report having been battered, and the results include miscarriages, stillbirths and a two to four times greater likelihood of delivering a low birth weight baby. Abused women are disproportionately represented among the homeless or suicide victims. Victims of domestic violence are being denied insurance in some states because they are considered to have a 'pre-existing condition' (www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html).
Historical Overview

Interest in, and focus on, domestic violence/battery arose out of the Women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Consciousness raising groups brought women together and opened discussion on topics such as rape and sexual violence against women. As women shared experiences, they realized that domestic violence and sexual assault had many ingredients in common: the victims were almost always women; the violence seemed to occur across the boundaries of age, race, religion, and economic status; the victims were not believed; they were accused of acting in a provocative manner, or somehow "asking for it"; the stigma of "going public" about the rape or violence often caused more pain; and the common acceptance of stereotypes that portray men as being somehow prone to violence and aggression, at the mercy of their "animalistic" urges, and thus somehow biologically predisposed to commit certain acts, argued against rape or domestic violence being treated seriously as a crime. Finally, there was limited space for legal action: rape victims were often doubly victimized by police and the criminal justice system, trials were traumatizing, and often, unless there was incontrovertible evidence that gross violence was involved, the system did not punish men reliably or consistently.

The case for battered women was all that and more: sheltered within the sacred bonds of the family, home and the private, they were also unable to cry "rape," even though rape was often involved in battery; they were tied
to their abuser by social, economic, emotional, and religious bonds; family members were often unwilling to deal with the stigma and told the victim to "go home, he's a good man, he loves you." This was compounded by the system, which did not want to interfere in the bonds of family. Even today, the social welfare system is designed to keep families intact, and the stories are legion of children who have been returned to abusive or neglectful situations because the "family" should remain together.

Perhaps more disturbing for victim advocates, tales circulate of courts who have awarded child custody to the (most often male) battering partner, since that parent is often most willing to "facilitate interactions with the absent parent," usually a woman who fled the relationship specifically to avoid that contact and unhealthy dynamic. Women who stay in battering relationships are also caught in the catch-22 of having "failed to protect" their children from violence, thus calling into question their ability to be a strong parental figure.

**Grassroots Action**

Part of second wave feminism's cry "the personal is political" was converted into grassroots action, and the first shelters for women and children victims of domestic violence were opened in the late 70s and early 80s. "Although some shelters for battered women opened in the mid-1970s, public attention to the plight of domestic violence victims did not increase dramatically until the 1980s" (Burt, 1996, p.6). "Grassroots advocacy played a pivotal role in bringing these crimes to public attention, creating demand for expanded legal protections, and offering services to victims" (p. 5)
Feminists created and staffed the first shelters, which allowed women and children a place to which they might flee and, at the same time, offered job and coping skills should they decide not to return. Further, shelter staff and organizations such as NOW (National Organization of Women) began working within the system to agitate for legislation which placed blame and punishment on the offender. At the same time, they offered education to police forces in appropriate ways to deal with domestic violence situations.

Jones (2000) discusses the legal actions taken on behalf of victims. Feminist attorneys began to file lawsuits against police departments. Oftentimes battered women won their cases, or advantageously settled out of court. Class action law suits, on behalf of groups of battered women, were filed against court officers and police departments, to compel them to enforce laws against assault, arrest perpetrators, and help victims press charges in court. Important victories in similar lawsuits against police departments in Oakland, California and New York City, in 1976, "...prompted policy and procedural changes in those cities, sparked other lawsuits across the country, and convinced police in some jurisdictions, under pressure from local battered women's advocates, to change their policies without litigation" (2001, p. 22).

In 1984, Sherman and Berk supported the efficacy of arrest in domestic violence cases, leading to the development of pro-arrest or mandatory arrest policies in many parts of the country. That same year, the Family Violence Prevention and Services act, a report of the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence, provided grants for prevention
programs, shelters, victim assistance and technical assistance and training for police officers and law enforcement personnel in 20 states.

Perhaps not coincidentally, 1984 proved an important year in the advance toward federal protection for women, as injured women and even families of some women murdered by husbands or boyfriends brought suits against police. Multiple court actions charged police with “...failing to protect them as they would protect other crime victims, a violation of their civil rights” (Jones, 2001, p.23). The move to frame domestic violence as more than battery, but a violation of a woman's civil rights, was masterful and consequential. Courts began to uphold the rights of women to be protected – even if the abuser is her husband.

Jones tells us of a particularly troubling, landmark case:

... One woman, Tracey Thurman, won a suit against the police of Torrington, Connecticut, who had stood by and watched while her estranged husband stabbed and slashed and kicked her nearly to death. Awarding her substantial damages, a federal district court ruled that "a man is not allowed to physically abuse or endanger a woman merely because he is her husband. Concomitantly, a police officer may not knowingly refrain from interference in such violence, and, may not automatically decline to make an arrest simply because the assailter and the victim are married to each other" (Jones, 2001, p. 23).

The Violence Against Women Act

In 1990, Senator Joseph Biden proposed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which made domestic violence a crime against women's civil rights. In 1992, even before the act was passed, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court judges proposed model state codes for standards and punishment for domestic violence.
The VAWA addresses both sexual assault and domestic violence crimes. As aforementioned, sexual assault and domestic abuse share many common characteristics, including and perhaps especially important, that the preponderance of victims are female. Further, while sexual assault was legally treated as a felony, and domestic violence as most often a misdemeanor, or even a civil matter, both had traditionally been overlooked and/or under-enforced by the legal system. As explained by the Urban Institute's report “Evaluation of the STOP Grants to Combat Violence Against Women: The Violence Against Women Act of 1994” “… both have been subject to failures of the criminal justice system (law enforcement, prosecution, and the courts) to treat these offenses as serious crimes” (Burt et al., 1996. p. 5).

The report continues, highlighting that “In part, these failures have stemmed from public attitudes that did not demand a strong response” (p. 5). As we shall see in later chapters, the change of public attitudes was, and remains, the burden assumed by feminists, advocates and agencies engaged in proactive support of battered women: it is the burden, the responsibility and the right of “owners” of public problems.

Biden's proposed VAWA was ratified and signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, as title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (P.L. 103-322). The Urban Institute describes the signing as an event which “marked a turning point in federal recognition of the extent
and seriousness of violence against women, and a commitment to address the problem from the federal vantage point" (2002).

**Domestic Violence Becomes Visible**

Although Federal legislation awaited the mid 1990s for enactment, and law enforcement practices were slow in responding to domestic violence as a crime, the migration of domestic violence into the public sphere, where it was forged as a public problem, started in earnest during the 1980s and 90s in the U.S. and elsewhere. In 1995, Australia developed a government sponsored 10-year community education campaign. The focus of the campaign was on the perpetrators: asking them to accept responsibility, to leave the house. The program also encouraged men to speak to men about domestic violence. Follow up reports demonstrated that "The campaign has demonstrated the potential of using social marketing principals to achieve voluntary behavior change."

Here in America, corporations as diverse as The Body Shop, Motorola, and cigarette manufacturer Phillip Morris sponsored anti-domestic violence campaigns. The Body Shop provides a brochure "Stop Family Violence," which includes fundraising initiatives; definitions of family violence that include psychological, sexual, physical and financial categories; current statistics, including references and citations; a one-page answer to the familiar question "Why does she stay?"; warning signs of family violence; and multiple suggestions for how the reader/consumer can help. The brochure concludes
with contact information for national organizations that aid victims and families.

Motorola sponsored the "Donate a Phone" program, beginning in 1990. Spokesperson actress Susan Sarandon appeared on commercials asking people to donate old cell phones for use by domestic violence victims in an attempt to protect their freedom and mobility. Phillip Morris offered a message campaign, including print and television commercial media, supporting women victims, by focusing on the story of an individual woman and linking it to statistics surrounding violence. While one may inquire somewhat cynically about the public relations value of such work, especially in the case of the besieged Phillip Morris corporation, the insertion of such publications in the public sphere was a sign that the issue was receiving the critical publicity of widespread discussion.

Internationally, countries have created policies and programs to address domestic violence, including (but not limited to) Africa, Albania, Armenia, Australia, Bulgaria, China, Great Britain, India, Japan, Macedonia, Moldova, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Spain, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The US Newswire, (Sept 7, 2001) discusses the United States Helsinki Commission briefing which surveyed domestic violence in states participating in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The briefing examined "the extent to which governments, particularly law enforcement authorities, have fulfilled their responsibilities to protect individuals from such abuse" (p1008250n9543).
The Inter-American Commission of Women (2002) reports violence laws in Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Of those, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, all had laws enacted prior to the 1994 signing of the VAWA.

Media coverage of domestic violence included popular movies, such as "The Burning Bed" starring Farah Fawcett (1984). In 1994, "Defending Our Lives" won an Oscar for documentary film. The film, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4, concerns domestic violence episodes in the state of Massachusetts during one calendar year. It also includes the stories of four women, two white and two black, who were in prison for murdering their abusive partners.

There has been an explosion of books surrounding the topic, from popular fiction, like Black and Blue by Anna Quindlen (1998) to serious treatises on the issue. A recent survey of books available on Amazon.com (July, 2003) revealed 35 "hits" [excuse the awful pun] for books on "battering" and 426 for "domestic violence." [Note: in 2003, there were 34 on battering and 319 on “domestic violence.”]
Numerous websites exist that provide information, opinion, facts, statistics, advice and support. A partial list of them will be found in Appendix A. When searching the worldwide web for information, the google.com web crawler posted 879,000 for "domestic violence."

**Religious Response**

Religious leaders have jumped into the fray. Catholic Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, New Mexico, has been outspoken in his belief that wife beating is against the moral precepts of the church:

Domestic violence is a shameful exercise of power against those whose lives are entwined by ties of blood and family," Bishop Ricardo Ramirez ...said in a new pastoral letter. The letter, dated July 6 to mark the feast of St. Maria Goretti, contains an apology for mistakes made by clergy who contributed to the domestic violence by encouraging the abused to return to their abuser for the sake of the marriage. "To encourage a victim to return to such an environment without benefit of qualified professional help is irresponsible," Bishop Ramirez said in the letter. "When such errors are made or sinful actions are excused in God's name, the consequences are even more tragic." (America, July 16, 2001 v185 i2 p4.)

Ramirez cited pastoral precedent:

He repeated the U.S. bishops' statement in a 1992 pastoral letter that 'violence in any form -- physical, sexual, psychological or verbal -- is sinful; many times it is a crime as well.' Ramirez asked for the forgiveness 'of all persons affected by the inadequate response of the church's pastoral leaders to violence which has occurred in homes and in the family -- places meant to be of sanctuary for all persons.' (National Catholic Reporter, July 13, 2001 v37 i34 p10.)
Irish Catholic bishops have also made a strong stand against violence in the home:

A document titled Domestic Violence, by two Irish bishops' commissions, denounced all forms of violence in marriage and identified seven New Testament readings they said should not be used at Mass because they give "an undesirably negative impression regarding women." Four of the passages cited by the Irish bishops--Col. 3:12-21, Eph. 5:21-32, 1 Pt. 3:1-6 and Titus 2:4-5--are in the Lectionary. On Aug. 27, the day the document was released, the second reading at Mass included the verse, "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord." *(America, Sept 16, 2000 v183 i7 p4)*

Even the conservative Focus on the Family has, on its website, repudiated domestic violence as being repugnant to God's chosen people.

However........

Despite the increased attention to domestic violence over the past two decades, it remains a serious social problem. In part its persistence can be traced to the rhetorical struggle that has marked its definition as a public problem. This struggle has centered on the meaning and application of the term "domestic violence." While resistance to the issue-ownership asserted by feminists and advocates for battered women does not seem to have as clear an organizational matrix as the grassroots feminists, there is an obvious backlash against the primarily feminist-dictated view of domestic violence and an attempt to wrest control of the issue from those who were responsible for bringing it to public attention to begin with. We will examine one website, www.dvmen.org, the "Domestic Violence Against Men in Colorado" site as an example of public contestation for ownership of the terms and qualities involved in the issue.
Critics of the feminist conception of domestic violence have been in existence for as long as the battered women's movement itself. In 1993, CBS-TV aired a movie "Men Don't Tell" starring Peter Strauss, in which the victim was a man, frequently battered and at the mercy of his much smaller wife. Recently, there has been increased momentum in the form of a "battered husband" movement that claims statistics are not representative, that women batter as often as men, that mandatory arrest policies do more harm than good, that legislation actually works to prevent people from calling 911, and other serious charges.

While not specifically designated a "battered husband" advocacy forum, the website, www.dvmen.org, is the "Domestic Violence Against Men in Colorado" site. They are listed as being sponsored by the Equal Justice Foundation, and their motto, presented on the homepage, is "These words are written in defense of freedom."

Their site contains many chapters, full of sections with such provocative titles as "Cult Of The Domestic Violence Industry," "When Men Are Driven To Desperation," "The Dark Side Of Women," "Justifiable Violence Against Women," "The Change Of Life, Hysterectomies, And Domestic Violence," "A Toolkit To Destroy Families," and "The Emotional Terrorist." The site is headed by "Charles E. Corey, Ph.D" with contributors including one Psy.D, five Ph.Ds, two who list MAs, and one JD. Of the seventeen contributors, six are women.
While the aforementioned titles do indeed seem provocative, there is a bibliography containing over 300 references, many scholarly works and Bureau of Justice Statistics publications. Interestingly, there are articles authored by, and a bibliographical link for, Erin Prizzey, who is rather well known (and cited in Boulder County Safehouse literature) as "a key figure in the British battered women's movement" (Safehouse, 2000).

While it might provide web-crawler validity for the Equal Justice Foundation, Prizzy's work is most often cited out of context, as an argument to be overcome or in a manner that feminists might view as twisted. For example, in an unattributed article entitled: Is it always domestic violence?

Prizzy has the lead quotes:

**Is it always domestic violence?**

In a subsequent section we examine when it is not domestic violence. Erin Pizzey states that:

"...it is essential to understand the differentiation between our use of the words battered and violence-prone. For us, a battered person is the innocent victim of another person's violence; a violence-prone person is the victim of their own addiction to violence."


"...that the difference between a non-violent woman and a violent woman is that a non-violent woman can get into a relationship with a man who is violent, and love the man but hate his violence. A violence-prone woman will look for a violent man with whom she will hate the man but cling to his violence."

A non-violent, and even a violence-prone woman may need to call the police because there is a real need for intervention. However, there are many other reasons a woman may report a male. (Retrieved 7/26/03 from http://www.dvmen.org/dv-18.htm#pgflid-1000404)
Note that, while Prizzy is indeed cited, her work seems merely a springboard from which to launch an attack on the current system – the post 1994, VAWA-supported system – that the grassroots feminists fought to implement.

The article continues, citing reasons why women might call police, such as media reminders (equated with “propaganda” that “always includes the female victim and the male perpetrator” [italics theirs]).

The following direct quotes, taken in order, represent some backlash claims made by the article, most of which are diametrically opposed to the battered women’s movement’s claims:

- Some women call police because they are frightened by a minor incident. Or perhaps she thought calling the police was a ‘trump card’ in an argument...
- Some women make false reports because there are legal, financial, and child custody rewards for making a such [sic] reports, and there are no penalties for such lies...
- About one-half the men we encounter who have become ensnared in false allegations and the court-assisted vengeance and vindictiveness of a former intimate partner become so incoherent with rage that they appear to justify the laws they are trapped with...
- The present laws, generated by feminist doctrine, have as their avowed purpose permanently separating the man and woman no matter what the circumstances, and no matter how fervently the women wish otherwise...
- ...battering is only apparent in 3% to 5% of domestic violence cases.
- Commonsense should tell you that if you take everything a man holds dear from him, he will be dangerous. Throw him out on the street, take his children from him, convict him without a hearing, throw him in jail on unproven charges, take away the rest of his civil liberties, and few men remain meek and humble.
- But the feminist politicization of the term ‘abuse’ renders it virtually meaningless...
- Many behaviors now branded ‘domestic violence’ by feminists are well within the range of normal human behavior. For example,

What is of interest and importance is the obvious attempt to present a different ownership claim in terms of responsibility and causal attribution: this issue is not a matter of life and death for women and children, caused by a patriarchal system, but rather the issue is one of gross infringement on civil liberties, especially for men, caused by feminists and their ilk. The victim here is, undeniably, the male: helpless and at the whim of vengeful women and a feminist-controlled legal system. In the Abstract to the website, which is recommended reading for anyone who wishes to understand the site, the Equal Justice Foundation states:

...Charges of domestic violence, often combined with allegations of child physical and sexual abuse, have become the weapon of choice for women in divorce and custody battles. Despite the fact that over 90% of these charges are lies, women are rewarded with the house and kids for making such statements, and face no penalty for their false accusations.

Further, they assert:

In studying the problems of family violence some simple facts emerge from study after study:
- The safest place for a child is with their biological father;
- The safest place for a woman is in her home married to the biological father of her children;
- Men and women are equally violent in domestic relationships;
- And finally, Erin Pizzey, who started the shelter for battered women movement in 1971, states that "Any country that has tried to create a political solution to human problems has ended up with concentration camps and gulags." [italics theirs]

The concept of concentration camps, strife, and warfare could easily have been used by feminists in their description of the experience of battered
women. Here we see it used to present the reality of men in America in this century. Indeed, analogies of war (even more poignant and pointed than the “battle of the sexes” so common in popular discourse) are used by both sides. We shall see the feminist appropriation in the movie *Defending Our Lives*, in Chapter 4. Below, we see its use by the Domestic Violence Against Men in Colorado site:

...It would be well to keep these fundamental findings in mind as you proceed through these pages. *But make no mistake, we are engaged in an epic battle between two incompatible ideologies with fundamentally different views of the rights of the individual and the power of the state, with the future of civilization at stake.* [from “Abstract,” italics mine]

The website posits the battle between patriarchy “representing the present system” and matriarchy “representing the return of the goddess and earth mother, and a more primitive relationship between man and woman and their children. And the return of the matriarchy is to be imposed by force of law when reason and logic fails.” No doubt feminists would assert that patriarchy has been, and continues to be not only imposed by law and custom, but seminal to the existence of both.

The site does make clear that its attack is aimed at *radical feminists* with the disclaimer, also from the site Abstract:

It is basic to our premises to understand that we are not speaking here of those individuals who consider themselves “feminists” because they support equal rights under the rule of law, equal opportunity in employment and education, equal protection under law, and protection from violence for all persons. These positions are supported by those on the right and the left and certainly by the Equal Justice Foundation.
One only need read the next paragraph to view the construction of said radical feminists and their agenda:

In the radical feminist ideology there is no distinction between potential and probability. An allegation suffices for proof. Hearsay is taken for gospel. The terms "accused" and "accuser" are therefore inadmissible. As defined by radical feminists the only acceptable terms with reference to males are "abuser," "batterer," "offender," or "perpetrator." And women are always, and only, "victims," and violence by a woman is exclusively "self defense." [italics theirs]

Thus even in 2003, almost 10 years after the implementation of the VAWA, the issue is still contested, with strong arguments being offered for an alternative rhetorical construction, not only of the issue, but of the victim and the consequences: battered women and their children, victims of civil rights violations and helpless to escape without intervention are positioned against concerned and loving men and fathers, victims of gross abridgements of civil liberties, helpless to escape a system which caters to, and is successfully manipulated by, untruthful and vengeful women.

As if the matter were not already complicated enough, there are also competing theories about the locus of blame, if you will, or who is responsible for fixing the problem. One popular theory holds that domestic violence is a result of faulty interpersonal relationships, and the other that it is the result of a faulty social system.

A Tale Of Two Theories

There are two basic approaches to social problems in general. One school of thought regards social problems as matters of individual acts and responsibilities. Another school of thought treats social problems as systemic.
In Gusfield's (1981) study of drinking and driving, the responsibility for the social problem was affixed at the level of the individual: the individual driver is responsible for his/her actions and the consequences thereof.

The problem could well have been treated as a *social* problem: we, as a society, have a problem because we allow, even encourage and protect, the lightly regulated (virtually unregulated if the individual is over 21) consumption of a mind and perception altering drug known to, almost without exception, cause discomfort, disease, physical impairment, and lapses in judgment. Moreover, this readily available and socially sanctioned drug figures prominently in cases of violence and sexual assaults.

It is not hard to imagine well-reasoned arguments for either perception, and easy to understand how well-intentioned, intelligent and caring persons could view the problem, reasonably, as either a matter or individual acts or as a consequence of systemic forces, greater than the individual.

While Gusfield persuades that the assignment of responsibility was at the level of the individual, he does not claim that, indeed, the problem of drinking-and-driving is uniquely or solely a result of the individual, independent of social pressure to comply with accepted mores. The matter is not one lending itself to a de facto, pre-given assignation of blame: it is a matter of perception, and perception is almost always a matter of rhetoric. We will see here, and again in Chapter 4, that the struggle between competing theories for the assignment of locus of blame remains pertinent to the advocates' struggle to establish patriarchal societal mores as causal and to
remove from the victim the accusation that she is responsible for her victimization.

"Family Violence" vs. "The Feminist"

Stalans and Lurigio (1999) outline two, primary, competing perspectives on domestic violence. Each offers differing reasons concerning the causes of the violence. The key lies in the resulting action: solutions are vastly changed if the causal attributions are significantly divergent. One theory is the "family violence perspective" which presupposes that men and women from a violent family background will be equally violent. While seeming to agree with data offered by feminist anti-domestic violence literature -- that children who witness violence are much more likely to repeat it as adults --- this approach focuses on individual batterers and suggests individual treatment.

The second perspective, the "feminist perspective" holds that societal values, particularly patriarchal values that subordinate women, foster domestic violence. Domestic violence is seen primarily as the exercise of power and control by males over females. Following the feminist perspective results in giving police broader powers to arrest batterers, and providing shelters for women victims where they can receive counseling, support, and a safe place to live.

Key to an understanding of these theories is the locus of blame. In almost any incarnation of the family violence perspective, the focus is on individual families and the dynamics therein. The unit of study is the single
family unit. In an interesting parallel to Dana Cloud's (1998) work the family violence perspective tends to diffuse societal responsibility and place the blame on the individuals in the situation. As the blame is localized, so is the cure: get the batterer help, get the family into counseling, let them solve their problems. This is especially appealing to proponents (and equally troubling to feminist advocates) as it sends the problem "back where it belongs" -- in the private sector, between a man and his wife and whomever they choose to "let in" as a moderator or counselor.

The feminist perspective, however, diffuses the blame across society as a whole: it is the social system that is indicted. We are a culture of violence, and a culture which allows men to systematically rob women of their rights because men are, per patriarchy, the "natural" leaders, and, thus, women are/must be subordinate.

Since feminist accounts place the blame on society as a whole, remediation must be on the level of society: laws; law enforcement; education of citizenry; social change in terms of the way violence is analyzed and dealt with; economic and social support for women and children who must form their own, self-sufficient family unit.

Both approaches, the family violence and the feminist perspective, hold merit and suasive potential. Indeed, feminists appropriate the family violence perspective (that children exposed to violence will beget violence) as a primary reason for charging perpetrators of domestic violence with child abuse if the alleged violence occurs in the presence of children. That said,
the family violence perspective does present a challenge that feminists must overcome. In its advocacy of domestic violence as a family systems problem, the perspective encourages, and indeed may be seen to support, the continued presence of domestic violence as a relationship-bound, and thus inherently private matter, whose cause and remediation should thus be a matter of the private sphere, the world of the home. Individuals bear responsibility for the creation, maintenance and/or correction of the situation. In many ways, this may be seen as reflective of the status quo the feminist perspective must unseat before the issue can truly be judged as a "public" problem.

As may be expected, the feminist approach, with its insistence on societal locus of the problem, requires vigorous social agitation. One of the consequences, also, is that, in a busy and fragmented social system, the problem must be made to seem as though it is my problem. Among the vastly competing cries and claims each individual is exposed to, those who demand social change can only accomplish it if an argument is presented, if good reasons are put forward and accepted by individuals who are then motivated to take action. In other words, it is the enactment of the rhetorical calling of a public into being, a public which can act to mediate and solve the problem.

Further, we must not lose sight of the reality that, as would-be owners of the issue, feminists must assign causal responsibility systemically (patriarchy is the villain) while dealing with the actuality that change can only
happen, for each woman, very much on the level of the individual and her efforts to escape an abusive relationship, to move from victim to survivor...

This becomes an interesting balancing act, when put into actual practice at the level of the shelters: individual women and their children are given safety, education, support, encouragement, and urged to leave the abusive situation. The work of "change" from a victim to a survivor is borne by the victim. She, ultimately, is the one who must find a job, living accommodations, learn to work within the system, learn to make the system work for her, and all in a span of six weeks!

If there is a movement from "victim" to survivor, that action can only be accomplished by the individual woman. All the help and resources in the world cannot force her to take action. At the same time, the shelter lobbies for social justice and a change in the system: macro political maneuvers which go beyond the individual women and argue that women are oppressed as a group. The Boulder County Safehouse recently celebrated their 20th anniversary with the motto "Envisioning a Future Without Violence."

Acceptance of this balancing act reveals challenging dynamics, especially when we look at empirical evidence for how the issue is engaged by real people in real discourse communities.

**Safehouse As A Boundary Spanner**

While a more in-depth history of Boulder County Safehouse will be discussed in Chapter Four, the basic frame was begun in 1972. From a
YWCA sponsored program, "Options for Women" grew a Boulder Task Force on Women and Children. The Task Force urged the creation of a Women's Resource Center, and in 1974, the Boulder County Women's Resource Center opened. The Resource Center began as an educational, support and referral service. Soon an emergency shelter was opened. In 1981, Boulder County Safehouse became an independent, non-profit organization. The combined roles of sheltering women and children, and public advocacy remain clear. The dedication to accomplishing both roles places Safehouse in a boundary-spanning position.

One way to view the issue is to see Safehouse as a symbolic boundary spanner between the private realm, where women often live in voiceless silence, and the public realm, where women reclaim their voice and place as citizens. It is a transitional space for women and children, in part because there are limits on their stay, and, possibly, in part because dependence upon a shelter is not an acceptable substitution for dependence upon a dysfunctional relationship. Safehouse is also, physically, a boundary spanner: the emergency shelter is in a "secret" location; its residents are protected, counseled, listened to, supported, educated, and guided to reclaiming their status as a participant in society. The shelter is a "house" and as such has expectations and practices, similar to "family" relationships in many homes: self disclosure is accepted but not forced; ethical communication a goal and practice; household chores and rules and regulations are in effect; negotiation of personal space and boundary issues is common. It is a place where
emotions and pain are present. It is a place designed to heal. It is a place where vulnerability is a given, empathy a requirement, and nurturing second nature. In short, an attempt is made to make the shelter personal, private, protected and healing.

But Safehouse is more than the emergency shelter. It is also an "outreach" organization: a non-profit corporation employing paid staff, a large group of volunteers, and programs designed to reach out to the community. These outreach services include an Advocacy program, including Legal Advocates who "assist victims with obtaining restraining orders, offer support at pre-trial conferences and provide training for prosecutors, judges and police" (all following descriptions are from Safehouse, 2002).

There are Outreach Services, including the Outreach Counseling Program, which "offers both individual and group counseling for adult, children and teen victims who are not in need of emergency shelter"; and a Safehouse Transitional Services Program, which "works with other community and government agencies to provide long-term, comprehensive support for women as they work toward emotional and economic self-sufficiency."

Education has not been neglected: "the foundation of Safehouse's school-based Education Program is the Choices and Change Curriculum, a tool developed to educate students K-12 about interpersonal violence". The Peer Education Program is "a collaborative effort between Safehouse and the Boulder County Rape Crisis Team to educate middle and high school
students about the issues of dating violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment".

In addition, Safehouse, through the Speakers Bureau, also "provides educational presentations throughout the community in order to build awareness and encourage change in the beliefs and practices that perpetuate domestic violence." Volunteers can serve in an array of roles, as Children's Volunteer, Shelter Support Staff, Victim Advocate, Court Advocate, Peer Educator, Peer Mentor, and member of the Spiritual Support Team (an "interfaith group of spiritual leaders who provide domestic violence education to their religious communities and one-on-one support to survivors").

Thus Safehouse is both a metaphoric and literal boundary spanner.

To use, again, their own words:

The vision and mission of Boulder County Safehouse grew from a profound belief in the power of women. Emboldened by feminism and the understanding that domestic violence stemmed from sexism and power imbalances, the Safehouse Foremothers sought to create a refuge that could both change women's lives and change the world...Safehouse has worked to ensure safety and justice for battered women and their children, and to end the senseless tragedy of domestic violence...Our vision for the future, much as it was more than twenty years ago, is to simply end domestic violence, and to inspire a new generation to create relationships, families, and communities founded on respect, compassion, and a profound commitment to justice (Safehouse, 2000), [italics added].

Safehouse is attempting both "micro" and "macro" change: on the level of the individual woman victim/survivor, and on a societal level. They are grounded in both the personal, "private," and the public. They must provide discourse for both constituents; the private empowerment of victims as they
(hopefully) transition into survivors, and the larger "public" project where they hope to engage a public that can affect social change.

**Safehouse and an Attempt to Own the Issue**

As previously discussed, the battered women's movement is a direct offspring of the feminist/women's movement of the 60s and 70s. It was grassroots efforts, led by feminists, that named the issue and brought it to the attention of the public. As advocates sheltered and educated, they also lobbied and created a climate that resulted in legislative change, on city, state, and federal levels. It would be premature, however, to assume that advocates can rest on their laurels. As aforementioned, domestic violence is still a topic of concern to women, children, and society. Law enforcement alone cannot provide enough change to eliminate the problem:

Recognizing that attitudinal change and knowledge are essential to practical implementation of legal reforms, VAWA authorizes support for prevention, education, and training and the development of systems for maintaining records on violent incidents and perpetrators, and improving communication within the justice system."(Burt, et al., 1996, p. 7)

The Urban Institute reports that:

Changes in attitudes and public opinion are critical. Recognition of the harm of violence and the need of victims for protection and redress is necessary to effective form...efforts to extend legal protections to women have been hampered by the reluctance of judges, police, and prosecutors to recognize the magnitude of the harm inflicted on female victims...public education is now a topic priority of foundations (Burt et al, 1996, p. 8)
Moreover, women victims of abuse are not identical to victims of other crimes:

The system must take into account that women victims of violence differ from other crime victims in important ways...the system must redefine its mission to include protection and prevention of future harm, not just accountability in the form of arresting a perpetrator. (Burt et al, 1996, p. 9)

This, then, is where a new contested terrain is reached: not over the question of whether battering a woman is "wrong," but in terms of what do we mean by "domestic violence?" Advocates and feminists, and even, in some cases previously noted, representatives of the Catholic Church, consider emotional and verbal abuse to be violence. Body Shop literature shows the public presence of the financial component of abuse, long held important by victim advocates. Social change may indeed take place individual by individual, but feminists, victim advocates and survivors, and agencies which deal with them, are faced with redefining the face of the abuser, as well as the face of the victim: faces they originally sketched in the early 70s.

Chapter Three will provide entry into an examination of this question, by showing the issue as particularly suitable to an application of publics theory, of ownership of issues, as presented by Gusfield; of the morally imperative, vernacular call to a public empowered to act on behalf of women and children; and one which can best be analyzed by looking at narratives, as they attempt to span boundaries, give voice to the voiceless, and change the face of domestic violence.
CHAPTER THREE
PRIVATE LIVES, PUBLIC PROBLEMS, AND THE NARRATIVE LINK

Introduction

The boundary between the public and the private is the locus of potentiality and possibility for social change. It is an area in tension, as the world of the private—the home, the family, behind closed doors—interacts with, and sometimes against, the world of the public, of civil society, of strangers and difference and courts of law. Many members of society recognize the difference between what is acceptable behavior in public, and what is allowed in the home: witness the score of etiquette books, or trace the progression from the theatrum mundi of Sennett (1974). Most recognize that there is a clear separation between the realms. That boundary was challenged by the feminists’ cry that “the personal is political,” but the boundary remains in place.

What happens, then, when there is a challenge to the line drawn between the private and the public, when there is an issue that belongs “in the home” but which some citizens say requires the spotlight of public attention and the benefit of public remediation? That is the challenge faced by feminist advocates, survivors and members of the movement to end domestic violence: their argument is that domestic violence is not merely “private” as a
function of family dynamics, but "public," in that the consequences are societal in impact and require society's intervention and remediation.

**On, And About, The "Public"**

What is the primary difference between a private issue and a public one? What distinguishes something that is "public"? How do we recognize it? For most of us, public would be that which is seen, which is accessible, which is present to our view as we go about our daily lives. Past generations have had different standards of what was considered "fit for public" --- think of Grandmother's sense of propriety in fashion and manners. While standards of acceptability and permissiveness might change from generation to generation, society to society, certain things remain constant: public is where things are seen. Public is (with the notable exception of "reality television") outside the home. In many ways, public is where the action is. Certainly a strong public forum is necessary in a democratic or representative government, where the assent of the masses is theoretically required for political change to be implemented.

But how is an issue brought before the citizens and legislators? What is involved in shining attention on an issue or cause that members of society deem important? Few issues spring full-blown from an elected official's mind, transformed into legislation without any public input (though that public may well be a narrow section of constituents or lobbyists).
Sociologist Joseph Gusfield (1981) attempts to answer just such a question, through his examination of the formation of drinking-driving as a "public problem." Gusfield traces the formation of "drinking-driving" as an issue that is rhetorically constructed and presented to "the public." In the rhetorical construction of "drinking-driving," there are many similarities to the way domestic violence is/has been constructed. As Gusfield points out: "All situations that are experienced by people as painful do not become matters of public activity and targets for public action" (p.3).

Gusfield provides us a lens through which we can view groups and individuals as they attempt to shape society through rhetorical means, as they struggle to "own" an issue, thereby assigning cause and responsibility. He shows a rhetorical sensibility in that he believes "the public" to be an agonistic realm, where there is active contestation for control of issues. He also allows analysis of characters involved in the struggle, and provides a framework for naming the practical goal of that struggle: control and ownership of an issue; the ability to assign causal and political responsibility; the ability to define the nature of the phenomenon, to name it, to describe it in such a way that it then becomes reality. Against the often-heard concerns about the language used to describe violence to domestic partners being hidden behind a patina of "normal relational ups and downs" or "romantic squabbles" Gusfield offers the real politik answer: the comparative success at issue ownership by those who see the issue through a less threatening lens.
Gusfield begins his analysis of the construction of drinking-driving with the separation of "public" and "private" problems:

It is useful to distinguish public problems from private ones. All social problems do not necessarily become public ones. They do not become matters of conflict or controversy in the arenas of public action. They do not eventuate in agencies to secure or in movements to work for their resolution. Whether or not situations should be public problems is itself often a major issue. (1981, p.5).

He asks a familiar question: "How is it that an issue or problem emerges as one with a public status, as something about which 'someone ought to do something'?" (p. 5). One answer is to look at who "owns" the issue:

The concept of 'ownership of public problems' is derived from the recognition that in the arenas of public opinion and debate all groups do not have equal power, influence, and authority to define the reality of the problem. The ability to create and influence the public definition of a problem is what I refer to as 'ownership.' The metaphor of property ownership is chosen to emphasize the attributes of control, exclusiveness, transferability, and potential loss also found in the ownership of property. (1981, p. 10)

Thus the agency or organization which "owns" the problem has a great deal to say in how the matter is framed, presented, understood, and resolved. The owner can assign "blame" by making assertions and attributions of causal responsibility (who or what caused this condition to exist) and political responsibility (who/which group is obligated to "take action" to correct or ameliorate the problem).
As with many issues when power is involved, the ownership, or disownership, of an issue can be hotly contested:

...the status of a phenomenon as a problem is itself often a matter of conflict as interested parties struggle to define or prevent the definition of a matter as something that public action should 'do something about'

...there is a recognition that specific public issues are the legitimate province of specific persons, roles, and offices that can command public attention, trust and influence. They have credibility while others who attempt to capture public attention do not. Owners can make claims and assertions. They are looked at and reported to by others anxious for definitions and solutions to the problem. They possess authority in the field. Even if opposed by other groups, they are among those who can gain the public ear. [Gusfield 10].

This ability to "gain the public ear" is particularly significant, indeed critical, in a society where, as Gusfield has pointed out, not all have equal access to power, to authority, and to the media --- necessary ingredients to generate critical publicity and call for public response and judgment on an issue. Further:

The question of ownership and disownership is very much a matter of the power and authority groups and institutions can muster to enter the public arena, to be kept from it, or to prevent having to join. The power to influence the definition of the reality of phenomena is a facet of the politics of reality' (p.12).

Gusfield also stresses the importance of the agonistic nature of public contention. The presence of conflict allows us to view the process of struggle to own and form the issue. When no conflict can be seen, when there is no challenge to the presentation of reality, the issue might well have moved into a state of reification and acceptance of the owner's view that the issue is reflective of "the way it is":

...
The existence of overt conflict and debate makes the politics of an issue manifest. The lack of such conflict may hide the very features of the structure which make for its absence, which prevent the opposite forms of consciousness from being observed. They contribute to 'what everyone knows,' what is 'common sense' -- the taken-for-granted by which the objective world is made into experienced life. (p. 13)

And: "This absence of alternative modes of consciousness is also the subject of analysis of the structure of public problems. Acceptance of a factual reality often hides the conflicts and alternative potentialities possible. Ignoring the multiplicity of realities hides the political choice that has taken place" (13).

Gusfield refers to the three aspects of structure central to public problems: ownership, causation and political responsibility. Ownership allows the assignment of responsibility.

**Gusfield on the Assignment of Responsibility**

Responsibility, according to Gusfield, can be both causal and political:

To say that 'cancer was responsible for someone's death' is to use the term responsibility in a manner different from saying that 'parents are responsible for preventing their children from making noise.' The first usage looks to a causal explanation of events. The second looks to the person or office charged with controlling a situation or solving a problem. The first answers the question, How come? The second answers the question, What is to be done? The first -- causal responsibility -- is a matter of belief or cognition, an assertion about the sequence that factually accounts for the existence of the problem. The second -- political responsibility -- is a matter of policy. It asserts that somebody or some office is obligated to do something about the problem, to eradicate or alleviate the harmful situation. (pp. 13-14)

Owners have tremendous power in labeling an issue and assigning responsibility. "Quite often those who own a problem are trying to place obligations on others to behave in a 'proper' fashion and thus to take political
responsibility for its solution" (p. 14). Thus "The structure of public problems is
then an arena of conflict in which a set of groups and institutions, often
including governmental agencies, compete and struggle over ownership and
disownership, the acceptance of causal theories, and the fixation of
responsibility" (15).

Those who own the issue, for all practical purposes, determine the
scope and parameters of the problem, assign blame for its existence, and
dictate who is responsible for fixing the problem. One can hardly fail to notice
the political and rhetorical benefits of "owning" an issue, and one can also
understand why ownership would remain an area of contestation in an
agonistic public realm. Whose voice is heard? The owner.

**Other Important Dimensions of Public Problems**

Gusfield offers another intriguing aspect of public problems: they must
address both cognitive and moral concerns:

As ideas and consciousness public problems have a structure which
involves both a cognitive and a moral dimension. The cognitive side
consists in beliefs about the facticity of the situation and events
comprising the problem... The moral side is that which enables the
situation to be viewed as painful, ignoble, immoral. It is what makes
alteration or eradication desirable or continuation valuable. (p. 9)

Both the moral and the cognitive dimensions must be present for a for
a phenomenon to be recognized as a "problem." This is particularly intriguing
in the area of domestic violence. The cognitive dimension would required that
we accept the facticity of a phenomenon and that the negative impacts can be
altered: "...events and situations are ... cognitively assessed. A world of fact
is posited. Crime may be seen as a result of broken homes, poverty, genetics,
community disorganization, or any number and type of variables.

Significantly there are beliefs about the alterability of phenomenon" (Gusfield, 1981, p.9).

Gusfield uses the examples of age and racial inequality: aging is usually perceived to be "negative" and/or "unfortunate," but considered inevitable; while racial inequality is also viewed negatively, but considered alterable. Thus, the phenomenon of domestic violence must be established as factual (through research, crime statistics, newspaper articles, etc) and also as alterable (victim assistance programs, violence prevention initiatives, legislation, police training, community information programs).

While facticity can certainly be debated, it is a debate that evidence and statistics can generally resolve. It is of the realm of inartistic proof. The moral dimension, however, requires a different form of proof. "The moral side of a problem suggests a condemnable state of affairs from the perspective of someone's morality" (Gusfield, 1981, p. 9). The question of whose morality might well be answered by Gusfield's attribution of ownership, but the question of how the evaluation is made and supported is square in the realm of rhetoric, as we shall see with Hauser's (1999) polyvocal lattice of publics and counterpublics present and weigh evidence for public judgment. "Without both a cognitive belief in alterability and a moral judgment of its character, a phenomenon is not at issue, not a problem" (Gusfield, p. 10).

Thus, ultimately, for a phenomenon to exist as a problem demanding public remediation, it must be rhetorically constructed as social knowledge:
existing, alterable, and morally deserving of attention and action. Put simply:
a problem isn’t a problem until we recognize it as such, and it does not
become a “moral problem” for me until I accept my responsibility to render
moral judgment. And how are moral judgments made? Hauser (1999) would
answer:

[Civil] judgment is an outcome of the vernacular exchanges dispersed
across media, public meetings, face-to-face interaction, ballots and even
representative deliberation ... It occurs when opinions emanating from a
variety of perspectives and held for a variety of reasons nevertheless
converge to form a prevailing view of preference and possibly of value...
[Civil judgment] expresses a common understanding among diverse
social actors primarily based on formal and vernacular exchanges
enacted in and across public spheres ... [and] reflects the associational
character of relationships that depend on nothing beyond the common
action of discussion and debate occurring in these discursive spaces...
Civil judgment expresses a shared understanding that grounds an
actually existing public (p. 74).

Further: “... Importantly, civil judgments are the vehicle for
transporting us from our private and subjective existence into the common
realm of shared reality” (p. 76).

Those who view partner abuse as a form of violence that is more than
“romantic squabbles” appear to be succeeding in their efforts to own the
issue. Partner abuse – physical and psychological – is now accepted as a
form of violence, “domestic violence.” The presence of state and federal
legislation, education and outreach from publicly accepted authorities on the
issue (Safehouse, various coalitions on domestic violence), and the “common
Scholars observed that in the 1800s, there emerged a new strand
knowledge” that valid information on the issue can be obtained from these
sources indicate that the facticity and remediability of the issue have been
established. These successes at establishing the cognitive dimension of the
problem have not been matched, however, with equal success at establishing its moral dimension.

Domestic violence cannot be merely "a condemnable state of affairs from the perspective of someone's morality" (Gusfield, 1981, p. 9; italics mine). It must be condemnable from the perspective of my morality, and yours, and other citizens/strangers like you and me. It must be personally important to individuals in a discourse community.

This process of an issue becoming a public problem calling for remedy requires a public space, a public sphere, where discourse communities come into being, and exchange ideas leading to judgment. There must be a forum where individuals can engage in the formation of critical publicity and its goal: analysis and judgment.

**Discourse Communities and “The Public Sphere”**

The notion of discourse communities is central to action in the public forum. While Gusfield does an admirable job of outlining the contestation for control and ownership of an issue, past history and rhetorical analysis has focused attention on the concept of a singular, reified “public” or of a unified “public sphere.” For a historical perspective and current discussion of public sphere(s) we will rely heavily on cornerstone work done by Habermas and Fraser, but focus on more recent and challenging work of Hauser.

Scholars observed that, in the 1800s, there emerged a new arena, aside from that of the Church, and the State, and separate even from the realm of economics, as groups of citizens began to gather in coffeehouses
and salons, fueled by the explosion of print and the forerunners of our modern newspapers, and this group, these groups, began to gather and discuss politics. "These new spaces afforded a public sphere in which a public could form an opinion that might challenge the state's primacy in setting social purposes and that might expect its understanding to bear weight on what the state did" (Hauser, p. 23). They were, according to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere, and from them emerged a concept we deal with today: public opinion, vox populi, the voice of the people. As representative governments replaced feudal systems, the middle class, the tradesmen and shop owners, began to flex muscle and attempt to intervene in matters of state.

In Habermas, the public sphere is counterfactual: it is a realm where rationality rules supreme, where all are granted access, where claims must be redeemed, and where reason decides the issues of the day. His work is, in some ways, a lament for the public, as colonization by special interests represents the death knell for a vital and engaged public sphere.

**The Habermasian Public Sphere**

In 1974, Habermas concisely outlined the characteristics of "the public sphere":

By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion --- that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions---about matters of
general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today, newspapers and magazines, radio and TV are the media of the public sphere. We speak of the public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state. Although state activity is so to speak the executor of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it. To be sure, state authority is usually considered "public" authority, but it derives its task of caring for the well-being of all citizens primarily from this aspect of the public sphere. Only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutional influence over the government through the instrument of law-making bodies. (p.49)

Habermas's analysis traces the existence and ultimate demise of a temporally located and unique sphere.

Habermas rather quickly came under criticism, especially from feminists who argued, with some force and a good measure of judicious right, that Habermas' "public" was exclusionary, systematically denied access to women and minorities, and did not allow for alternate ways of argument and persuasion: "the Bourgeois public sphere was, for the most part, a restricted male preserve" (Landes, 1992, p. 111) -- a significant departure from Habermas' ideal of equal access. Indeed, Eley (1992) charges that "The most consistent of these exclusions... is based on gender" (p. 308). And

The new category of the "public man" and his "virtue" was constructed via a series of oppositions to "femininity" which both mobilized older conceptions of domesticity and woman's place and rationalized them into a formal claim concerning women's "nature." At the most fundamental level, particular constructions of "womanness" defined the quality of being a "man", so that the natural identification of sexuality and desire with the feminine allowed the social and political construction of masculinity. In the rhetoric of the 1780s and 1790s, reason was conventionally counterposed to "femininity, if by the latter we mean (as contemporaries did) pleasure, play, eroticism, artifice, style, politesse, refined facades, and particularity" [Landes, 1988, p. 46]. Given
this mannered, frivolity, women were to be silenced to allow masculine speech, in the language of reason, full rein (p. 309).

The concept of a "unitary" sphere, of "a" public sphere, was challenged. If the concept of "a" public sphere is revised to accept the view that multiple spheres exist, then one can assert, with Benhabib (1992) that

The public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse, evaluating their validity...In effect, there may be as many publics as there are controversial general debates about the validity of norms (p. 87).

Fraser's Critique of Habermas

Fraser (1990) lauds Habermas's contributions, and highlights the discursive nature of "the public sphere"

The idea of 'the public sphere' in Habermas's sense... designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction.” (p. 110)

Habermas's public sphere is central to the function of democracy. It is:

... conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions among state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory. (p. 111)

However:

...I contend that his analysis of the public sphere needs to undergo some critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield a category capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy. (p. 111)
Fraser finds four areas of specific concern:

...four assumptions that are central to the bourgeois, masculinist conception of the public sphere, at least as Habermas describes it. These are as follows:

- The assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate as if they were social equals...
- The assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics...
- The assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of private interests and private issues is always undesirable...
- The assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state. (p. 117-118)

Fraser's four points attempt to move Habermas's model from counterfactual, to something more closely approximating the way democracy works in the real world. First, Fraser echoes and supports feminists' contentions that merely intending to "bracket status differentials and to deliberate as if they were social equals" does not result in real-world diminishing of those differences. In fact, "...discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality. These functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers" (p. 119).

Mere recognition, even sincere desire to change, does not eliminate barriers: "...informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate..." (p. 119).
Moreover, "[bracketing] usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates" (p. 120).

Second, "The assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics" (p. 117). Fraser points out that a unitary public sphere further restricts access to dominant groups and prevents access by marginalized groups:

...where there is only a single, comprehensive public sphere...members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies...no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups... (p. 123)

The cost to the larger public is serious, as it potentially results in a reification of a narrow point of view, and a loss of the give and take among opposites that ought to be central when societies incorporate the voices of distinct cultures:

...cultural identities are woven of many different strands, and some of these strands may be common to people whose identities otherwise diverge, even when it is the divergences that are most salient...After all, the concept of a public presupposes a plurality of perspectives among those who participate within it, thereby allowing for internal differences and antagonisms and discouraging reified blocs. In addition, the unbounded character and publicist orientation of publics allows people to participate in more than one public, and it allows memberships of different publics partially to overlap. This in turn makes intercultural communication conceivable in principle. (p. 127)

Third, Fraser takes to task the "...assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that
the appearance of private interests and private issues is always undesirable" (p. 118). Using a most appropriate example, she points out that

...only participants themselves can decide what is and what is not of common concern to them. However, there is no guarantee that all of them will agree. For example, until quite recently, feminists were in the minority in thinking that domestic violence against women was a matter of common concern and thus a legitimate topic of public discourse (p. 129). [Thus suggesting the other side in the contest for issue ownership mentioned earlier]

The great majority of people considered this issue to be a private matter between what was assumed to be a fairly small number of heterosexual couples (and perhaps the social and legal professionals who were supposed to deal with them). Then feminists formed a subaltern counterpublic from which we disseminated a view of domestic violence as a widespread systemic feature of male-dominated societies. Eventually, after sustained discursive contestation ... succeeded in making it a common concern. (p.129)

The notion of a public deciding what is acceptable or appropriate for discussion further supports the notion of agonistic, multivocal, contested spheres of deliberation, and resists the reification of discursive action:

...there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries here. What will count as a matter of common concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestation. It follows that no topics should be ruled off limits in advance of such contestation. On the contrary, democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of the opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concern should not become so. (129)

Fourth and finally, Fraser critiques "The assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state" (p. 118). She rightly points out that a citizenry, or civil society, separated from the state is a citizenry deprived of real power and voice. A public which has no ability to influence change is a "weak public": a "...public[s] whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion
formation and does not also encompass decision making" (p. 134). The counter to a "weak public" is a "strong public:" "...whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision making" (p. 134). In terms of presenting a public whose opinion has consequence and weight:

"...the force of public opinion is strengthened when a body representing it is empowered to translate such 'opinion' into authoritative decisions" (p. 135).

Thus Fraser highlights the importance of discursively formulated spheres, and provided valuable critical modifications to Habermas which allow for a multiplicity of public spheres, highlights the contestation present in an agonistic public, empowers the publics to decide on appropriate inclusion of issues, and requires that publics not be limited to a weak role, but empowered to call for and enact change.

**On Contestation and a Multiplicity of Spheres**

With Fraser and feminist critics, the multiplicity of "publics" becomes possible and Habermas' singular public becomes one of many potential or actual discursive arenas. Fraser's key move posited the existence of subaltern counterpublics: groups which form in opposition or resistance to prevailing publics. She notes that some publics are formed not "merely" to discuss issues: they are called into being in response to perceived lack of power, access, and/or influence in an already existing sphere:

...history records that members of subordinated social groups -- women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians -- have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate countercdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.
Perhaps the most striking example is the late-twentieth century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

McLaughlin (1993) conurs: "Counterpublic spheres are defined as multiple and heterogeneous sites of oppositionality united only by a common concern to create new forms of social and political relations" (p. 610). She refers to

... the feminist proposal that the emancipatory potential of the feminist counterpublic sphere resides in a dialectic between internal and external functions:... they are places for withdrawal into specific, oppositional identity and... they have a "public" character directing oppositional claims and agitational activities outward through media and other channels toward wider publics (p. 600).

The concept of feminist subaltern counterpublic(s) is important when viewing the women's movement as a form of response to a dominant ideology, especially when domestic violence is an issue. They may be seen as counterpublic, formed in active opposition to institutions in the "broader" public which attempt to silence them:

The literary critic Rita Felski has argued that the American feminist movement...is an excellent illustration of alternative public space. She believes that the movement enabled women to oppose the rhetoric and institutions of the mainstream, and at the same time develop a new arena for discourse. Feminists, through books, journals, consciousness-raising groups, and other media, have been able to create a thriving parallel public sphere. This counter-public of female activists has developed what Felski calls a "counter-ideology," which challenges the values of the hegemonic culture industry. In the new public space created by the women's movement, feminists can use their preferred lens of gender to view the world around them. Although the women's movement pressures the mainstream from outside, feminist thought has certainly affected the contours of the conventional (male dominated) public sphere (Herbst, 1994, p. 15).

Thus Fraser's groundbreaking "naming" of subaltern counterpublics recognizes the existence of multiple sites of public engagement and significantly alters the notion of "a" public. Moreover, Fraser allowed for the
agonistic nature of the sphere, and accounted for the obvious and vocal attempts by marginalized groups to have input into the process whereby social decisions are made. Fraser's desire was to provide a picture of how democracy actually works.

**Contemporary Public Spheres: Hauser**

That move was left to Hauser. In Hauser we find an empirical, rhetorical, and ultimately rejuvenating view of publics as they actually exist and function in society. Hauser's model of the public sphere has these important features: He presents a rhetorical model, he expands on Fraser's concept of multiple publics, he develops a reticulate model of multiple public spheres, he advances a vernacular rhetoric model of public opinion, and, unlike Habermas, he contends that an adequate theory must be empirical in the sense that it comports with the practices of actually existing democracy and that claims about the role played by rhetoric in shaping publics be tied to concrete discursive practices of those who were actively engaged in attending to discourse and forming public opinion.

First and foremost, Hauser presents a rhetorical model of public(s):

Our relationship as members of a public is the fruit of our own rhetorical competencies, of our capacity to experience rhetoric. For this reason, rhetoric foregrounds publics and is rudimentary to their individuating identities; publics are constituted by the character of rhetorical exchanges shared among their members. (p.35)

Key is the notion of publics: multiple sites where citizens gather to discuss and decide upon issues of importance to members of the society. The call for a view of "publics" rather than a public, echoes Fraser, but expands,
based on the observation that "The model of a monolithic public based on shared interests is contrary to the actually existing coalitions of interests that can cooperate in pursuing a common end, even though for different reasons" (p. 31). The existence of multiple sites of agonistic contention, with publics and subaltern counterpublics competing for voice, demands a new understanding:

Our understanding of the possibilities for and the problems of society's active members requires a framework that connects their material shape and activity of discourse. We may begin this reconceptualization by acknowledging that "the public" is a generic reference to a body of disinterested members of a society or polity and is no more informative to an understanding of social knowledge and social action than an undefined reference to "they." It fails to capture the activities of the working part of society engaged in creating cultural awareness, social knowledge, and public policies and in evaluating deeds. These activities are often local, are often in venues other than institutional forums, are always issue specific, and seldom involve the entire populace. (p. 32)

Hauser reconceptualizes "the public as a plurality of publics grounded on their capacity for rhetorical engagement" (p. 14). Sites exist whenever, and wherever, citizens are actively engaged in discourse which attempts to arrive at and render a decision: "Thus we may define a public as the interdependent members of society who hold different opinions about a mutual problem and who seek to influence its resolution through discourse" (p. 32, italics Hauser's) and "...publics emerge as those who are actively creating and attending to these discursive processes for publicizing opinions, for making them felt by others. Their members are society's dynamic participants and judges who are actively engaged in evolving opinions that
influence how our cultural, social, and political wheels turn” (p. 33, italics Hauser’s).

Hauser’s theory is both rhetorical and empirical: “Sensible thought about publics requires capturing their activity: how they construct reality by establishing and synthesizing values, forming opinions, acceding to positions and cooperating through symbolic actions, especially discursive ones. Put differently, any given public exists in its publicness, which is to say in its rhetorical character” (p.33).

Publics are purposive: they are discursively constructed, called together and responsive to issues of concern to engaged citizens. Rather than viewing "the public" as a rather large, somnolent giant that can be roused from apathy in times of great crisis, "publics" might [I do tremble as I write this] better be viewed as localized cells of activity; fluid, moving into and out of existence as needed to render decisions, whose boundaries are permeable, whose existence can be traced in examination of the discourse which is both creative of, and evidence of, its life. Discourse, written, oral, is the lifeblood of these publics: “... a public's members converse through the everyday dialogue of symbolic interactions by which they share and contest attitudes, beliefs, value, and opinions. These are vernacular exchanges expressed in the language and style that members of a society must share to negotiate daily life in a community of strangers” (p.36).

Publics, by their very fluidity, their permeability, their ebb and flow to, and away from, issues, defy reification. We recognize them by their
discourse, by the detritus of posters, pins, letters to the editor, public speeches, parades, debates, attempts at crafting and presenting legislation.

Hauser expands upon Habermas and Fraser to present a rhetorical model of public spheres. He specifies six "critical points of difference between rhetorically conceived communication and the normative frame Habermas has proposed" (p. 46).

First, Habermas's idealized public "conceals the ways in which particular, often marginalized public arenas form and function" (p.46, italics Hauser's). Moreover, Habermas's model "fails to take account of ...[the] range of differences within and between spheres" (p. 46). A rhetorical model "requires openness to those conditions that produce a plurality of spheres within the public sphere" (p. 48).

Secondly, a unitary model of the public sphere "neglects the lattice of actually existing public spheres" (Hauser, p. 48, italics his):

Civil society cannot be equated with the state or reduced to the economy...it is a web of discursive arenas in which members of society engage one another in ongoing dialogues that continually confront public problems, constitute publics, and challenge within and across domains for the formation of public opinion (p. 49).

This is a fluid, changing, ongoing, living and dynamic process, thus "A rhetorical model reveals rather than conceals the emergence of publics as a process" (Hauser, p. 49, italics his).

Thirdly, Habermas's principle of disinterest "excludes those subspheres whose members are decidedly interested" (Hauser, p. 49, italics his), for example, the feminist subaltern counterpublic, or subaltern
counterpublics representing the battered women’s movement. Rhetoric, by its nature, is always addressed:

Discourse intent on gaining the assent of those who share the consequences of a public problem inevitably addresses them as particular individuals and groups. We adapt our arguments to our audience’s readiness to attend, understand, and respond... These rhetorical characteristics of addressed discourse belie the condition of disinterest. (p.50)

Hauser rightly points out that “People become engaged because issues tough their lives. A rhetorical understanding of communication regards life-engaging decisions as necessarily involving emotions. Emotions are essential for establishing the relationship between an attentive and empowered audience and their particular circumstances” (p. 51). Further, “In the classical tradition’s rendition of rhetoric as an architectonic productive art, engaging emotions in tandem with reason is necessary for sound public judgment...consequently they cannot arrive at a judgment that is ‘disinterested’” (p. 51). Hauser concludes “…accommodation of conflicting interests should supplant disinterestedness as a mark of a well-functioning public sphere” (p. 51, italics Hauser’s).

Fourth, “The criterion of communicative rationality contributes to the exclusionary character of the public sphere by constraining open access” (Hauser, p. 51, italics his). Hauser posits that

the rhetorical character of addressed arguments suggests local norms of reasonableness as a more appropriate criterion than global norms of rationality for assessing appeals in a given public sphere. This standard acknowledges that there are no absolutes for assessing the force of a better arguments since arguments have no force apart from satisfying those standards that particular publics are prepared to summon ...[which suggests that] good reasons are the operative basis for the actual state
of agreement forged through the polyvocality of a public sphere (p. 52, italics his).

Hauser's fifth challenge: the "norm of warranted assent to be achieved by generalizable arguments is contrary to the particularity of public issues" (p. 52). Since publics are indeed polyvocal, processual, interested, and specific, and moved by good reasons, their issues and discourses will similarly be particular to the publics. A rhetorical understanding of publics would concern itself with "how the dialogue within any given public sphere mounts appeals that lead participants to understand their interests and make prudent judgments" (p. 53).

Sixth, and finally, Habermas's ideal speech model "is at odds with conditions of diversity that define civil society" (p. 53). In a polyvocal, multicultural, latticed and interested sector of citizens

...interdependence with strangers does not require that you agree with those aspects of belief and conduct divergent from your own, but that you are tolerant of differences in order to sustain the range of cooperation necessary for society to function....The basic right of individuals to their cultural traditions creates a moral necessity for tolerance...Put differently, understanding does not necessarily lead to agreement (p. 53)

And: "Mutual dependency requires that communicative partners share a common reference world in which common understanding supplants warranted assent as the communicative norm for achieving reasonable mutual cooperation and toleration" (p. 53-54).

Thus Hauser moves beyond Habermas's counterfactual model of "a public sphere," incorporating and supporting the best of Fraser's plurality of spheres and desire to represent democracy as it actually functions, and offers
a rhetorical model of living publics as they exist today and attempt to exert influence on issues of interest to citizens.

Some Final Qualities of Public Spheres

Hauser's theory holds that the arena of multiple public spheres has a reticulate structure; their boundaries are fluid, rather than fixed, permeable rather than protected. They form and disband as issues—or other citizens—call them into being. Moreover, a citizen may belong to numerous publics. I, as a mother and citizen, respond to civic issues that require decisions as those issues affect me: should teenagers be allowed to get an abortion without parental notification? What about the issues of under-aged drinking? Do graduate students require a Bill of Rights? Should part-time instructors be unionized? To some degree, those issues call to me and I discuss with friends, and often with strangers, in an attempt to render a judgment.

Hauser also focuses on the discursive nature of the spheres: we know one is in existence because we see the discourse. We have a trail, not necessarily in public oratory, but in letters to the editor, in pins and badges, in bumper stickers and parades and billboards, in interviews and even, perhaps, on talk shows, all of which are empirical in the earlier-discussed Hauserian sense.

In sum, Hauser's rhetorical model includes the processual nature of a public: "publics do not exist as entities but as processes; their collective reasoning is not defined by abstract reflection but by practical judgment; their awareness of issues is not philosophical but eventful" (p. 64); the focus on
"local norms of reasonableness as a more appropriate criterion than global norms of rationality for assessing appeals in a given public sphere" (p. 52); the assertion that "good reasons are the operative basis for the actual state of agreement forged through the polyvocality of a public sphere" (p. 51); and his insistence that "We belong to a community insofar as we are able to participate in its conversations. We must acquire its vernacular language in order to share rhetorically salient meanings" (p. 67).

Further seminal requirements: a rhetorical model's "concern would be with how the dialogue within any given public sphere mounts appeals that lead participants to understand their interests and make prudent judgments" (p. 53); and the requirement for common understanding: "Mutual dependency requires that communicative partners share a common reference world in which common understanding supplants warranted assent as the communicative norm for achieving reasonable mutual cooperation and toleration" (p. 55).

In sum: A rhetorical model would require openness in its focus on the lattice of spheres within the Public Sphere; accommodate society's "multilogue" and view publics as emerging through discourse of engaged social actors; replace disinterestedness with "accommodation of conflicting interests" (p. 55); recognize that engagement in civic conversation includes "particular issues with specific interlocutors and audiences" (p. 55); realize that situation and audience specific "good reasons" are the operative basis for
consensus, and that those reasons are based on a shared, common reference world.

Finally, Hauser would

...argue for the Public Sphere as a nested domain of particularized arenas or multiple spheres populated by participants who, by adherence to standards of reasonableness reflected in the vernacular language of conversational communication, discover their interests, where they converge or differ, and how their differences might be accommodated. (p. 56)

The importance of Hauser’s theory is central to any research that attempts to make apparent the ways in which real citizens are called by issues to render judgment. That Safehouse sponsors and supports seminars and brown bag lunches to educate the community about domestic violence might not be surprising. That there are increased numbers of women -- and men-- attending “Take Back the Night” rallies; that Safehouse is responding to the challenge of engaging the public by changing their message to one of “social justice” rather than merely “stop domestic violence”; to read editorials in the Boulder Daily Camera challenging the notion that Domestic Violence is a result of patriarchy: these are signs that a public, or publics, is at work, attempting to engage citizens in discourse and discussion around an issue of some importance to the citizenry.

On Salience and Stories: Narrative Analysis

How does domestic violence attain, and retain, that salience which qualifies it as a public and not a private problem? One way is through an analysis of the rhetorically salient meanings that emerge from the public
sphere. That is to say, how the exercise of issue ownership constructs the reality of domestic violence. How do feminists, activists, survivors, and Safehouse personnel use narratives to create persuasive moral appeals and rhetorically salient meaning as they continue to struggle to own the issue and reframe the face and voice of the victim(s) of battery?

You and I may be members of a discourse community concerned with domestic violence as it calls us to render judgment. Gusfield (1981) reminds us that we must believe the issue contains both cognitive and moral dimensions. We must believe that a problem exists, and is remediable, and we must believe it is of personal moral concern. If our common understanding involves primarily statistics and lists of victims, our resulting judgment would be influenced by our knowledge: We would, quite possibly, conclude that it is a serious issue, and that it appears to be remediable, through the actions of others. We have acceded to Gusfield's facticity and remediability, a key two-thirds of his requirement for a problem to be perceived as public. We have not, however, necessarily concluded that there is any personal, moral imperative that involves us: it remains "somebody else's" problem.

If, on the other hand, our common understanding involves "Pat, my next-door neighbor who was in an abusive relationship" or your cousin, Terry, "whose daughter was a good woman and was beaten by her partner," then our knowledge becomes personal, our good reasons impacted and influenced by the stories we tell and share. Domestic violence becomes not an abstract situation that happens "out there" to faceless and largely voiceless victims, it
happens to people we know, people like us, people with whom we can identify. Our common understanding includes recognizable and identifiable persons.

As indicated, one way to increase understanding and identification is through the sharing of stories, or narratives. Narratives have been placed solidly in the realm of public moral deliberation (Fisher). Their importance to communities (Hauser) and individuals (Bruner) is well documented. Their ability to be appropriated is of importance to Ricoeur, as we shall see later in this chapter. But it is narratives as text, and narrative analysis of public discourse, that is central to this specific intellectual endeavor.

Stalin is reported to have said “A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic.” How is the tragedy of the one, and the reality of the million, woven together to create a rhetorically salient, shared meaning, with the additional moral imperative required to call a public together? Fisher (1984) tells us of the importance of narratives in public moral arguments. He outlines the key criteria of narrative coherence (does it make sense?) and narrative fidelity (is it true to my experience of life?), which bear striking similarities to Gusfield’s call for facticity and moral dimensions. Narratives are offered as reasons for, remedies to, and constructions of reality.

While the structure of the narrative is undeniably important, and structural analysis of narratives has provided a wealth of insight into deep structures of meaning, motifs, themes, linguistic markers, and rich typologies,
key to this analysis is not the structure of the narrative but the public moral arguments that they raise.

One feature is common across all analysis of narratives is: stories are emplotted. There is a teller of the tale. Part of this analysis is concerned with the speaker: who tells the story? Whose story is told? Is it a first-person tale of a victim of domestic violence? There is a difference between “I know someone named X who experienced violence...” and “My name is Chris and I am a victim...”

Another concern is where the story appears. This analysis, as aforementioned, is concerned with tales that have “made it” into the Public Sphere: narratives that are accessible to, or provided for, the greater public consumption; narratives held as examples, narratives that ask to be appropriated, narratives that give account and attempt to issue moral calls, or moral justifications, to an audience of strangers, in an attempt to form a public. The concern is with what narratives are available, and from what source, to the general citizen and potential member of a public.

Finally, this analysis is concerned with the good reasons offered for action --- or inaction --- on the part of the speaker. Remember that, a la Hauser, good reasons now supplant universal rationality as the criteria for judgment in vernacular public spheres. As narratives are used to issue a moral clarion call, what reasons do they provide to move the audience to action?
"Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (Riessman, 1993, p. 1). Thus the first task will be to identify narratives. This rhetorically informed narrative analysis will examine the narrative as it presents good reasons for decisions; as it constructs a view of reality that it offers for appropriation by interlocutors; as it reflects the common understanding of publics and their members.

Narratives will then be analyzed with respect to the theories of publics outlined above, with particular attention to Gusfield's issue ownership and Hauser's vernacular discourse, and how the two interact in the continuing struggle to gain, maintain, and exercise control over the issue of domestic violence.

Narratives make arguments, invite identification, rhetorically attempt to create a world. Their examination allows us to expand our understanding of how a public works; how an issue is presented; how ownership, responsibility, and obligation are contested over and constructed.

**On, and About, Narratives**

Wallace Martin (1986) tells us that theory of narrative has replaced the theory of the novel. He traces the history of the study of the novel/narrative from the New Critics emphasis on form, to the early 20th century battles which raged between those who emphasized form and those who emphasized content and subject matter. Martin cites Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) as key in arguing that the novel is "inevitably a 'rhetorical' form in that it involves communication from an implied author to an audience of readers..." (p. 22).
Martin proceeds to outline major divisions and shifts in the study of narratives. One key difference is the contrast between literary and anthropological approaches to narrative, trends which still exist in the literature today. Anthropologists study primarily oral tales: their research question attempts to establish how stories across a culture or cultures are similar, thus enabling them to come to conclusions about cultural values, similarities and differences. Literary critics, and their linguistic counterparts, attempt to discover how each story is unique. As Martin explains:

Rather than original, realistic stories fixed in print, the anthropologist encounters dozens of oral tales, many of them only slightly different from one another... In almost every respect, the questions the anthropologist must try to answer are the opposite of those posed by the literary critic: not “why is this story unique?” but “How and why is this similar to others?”; not “what did this (identifiable) author mean?” but “what function does this (anonymous) collective myth serve when it is repeated on certain occasions?” For the critic, a single work is the locus of meaning. (1986, p. 23)

French structuralists, including Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Bremond and Greimas were inspired by the anthropological approach. Heavily influenced by Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk-tale* (1928), structuralists seek the deep structures and underlying thematic similarities they view as inherent in narratives. While Bakhtin rejected the “formalistic emphasis on literary technique at the expense of social and political factors in the study of the novel” (Martin, 1985, p. 25) he nonetheless represented an anthropologically influenced analysis of novels and narratives.

The literary critic, linguistic form of analysis remains a strong presence in 20th and 21st century analysis. It can be seen in the works of Bamberg and...
Marchman (1991); Barton (1985); Bestgen and Costermans (1994); Gee (1989); Kreitler and Kreitler (1986); Omanson (1982); Reiser, Black and Lehnert (1985); Stewart (1986); Young (1982) and any analysis which concentrates on the experience of a singular unit of discourse.

Martin (1986) highlights a most important shift in narrative theory:

... the shift from formally defined linguistic models to communication models. The linguist and the critic who imitates him begin from our knowledge of what a noun and a sentence (or character and story) are: what they seek is a scientifically rigorous description of such structures... Recent theories based on the communication model may treat the literary work as a rhetorical form that conveys meaning from implied author to reader (Wayne Booth's approach) or study the literary and cultural conventions that shape literary perception... (p. 27).

A third key meta-view of narrative sees narrative, whether fairy tale, folk tale, novel or public moral discussion, as presenting arguments. This rhetorical view seeks neither to understand deep structures across cultures (although that may be part of a rhetorical analysis) nor does it seek solely to focus on the codas and sentence fragments which distinguish a particular story although, again, that may be part of a rhetorical analysis. When narratives are viewed from a rhetorical meta-perspective, they are seen as presenting arguments, as offering a worldview for acceptance by an audience, as being constitutive of reality, of society, of the individual.

**Theorizing Narratives: Ricoeur and Bruner**

Theorizing the importance of narrative is not a new occupation. Theorizing narrative as rhetorical became a significant intellectual enterprise beginning in the late 20th century (Fisher 1980, 1984, 1985). There are, however, few scholars who have created as rich a theorizing of the
importance of narrative as Jean Paul Ricoeur (a partial cite includes Ricoeur 1985, 1988, 1991, and 1995) and, after Ricoeur, Bruner (1987, 1990). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to trace, in any depth, the evolution of Ricoeur's theory on narrative, a very brief look at this process begins with the move from a phenomenological to a hermeneutic viewpoint. As such, interpretation becomes essential to Ricoeur.

Ricoeur also goes into great depth in his presentation of the relationship of time and narrative: indeed, his three-volume set, so named, is a masterful representation of his beliefs. Key to understanding the centrality of narrative is an examination of Ricoeur's perception of history and the essential historization of humans, an experience and reality that find actualization in narrative.

Narratives are, further, intrinsically and inescapably tied to relationships. As we are "thrown" into history, we are also thrown into relationships. Essential to an understanding of Ricoeur will be an examination of the ties between narratives and identity, empathy, and voice.

**On the Importance of Narratives**

The idea of narratives as important is an intuitive one for perhaps every child who has grown up on the stories of daring deeds and historic actions, or spent lazy summer afternoons immersed in the worlds of science fiction or mythology -- or fairy tales. Narrative permeates our lives, from "fish tales" to accounts, to metanarratives about how we come to be and what we should strive to attain. Part of the problem may be the very pervasiveness of
narratives: psychology, sociology, anthropology, classics, English, literature, fiction, drama, linguistics, cultural studies -- everyone has a theory -- sometimes two or three or a hundred --- about what a narrative is, what a narrative does, how narratives are, and how narratives should be; narratives upon narratives upon narratives about narratives.

And if one does decide to study the stories that we tell one another, the first finding is that -- despite its pervasiveness -- theorizing "narrative" is not simple. About all that many theorists can agree on is that narratives exist, and are powerful:

We seldom think about it, but we spend our lives immersed in narratives. Every day, we swim in a sea of stories and tales that we hear or read or listen to or see (or some combination of all of these), from our earliest days to our deaths. And our deaths are recorded in narratives, also -- for that's what obituaries are. As Peter Brooks (1984) puts it; 'Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves...We are immersed in narrative' (Berger, 1997, p.3).

Not only do we swim in a sea of narratives, we use them to navigate our world: Lewin (1994) states that "Because our life is in time, one of our fundamental forms of world-constitution is through composing narratives that emplot our activity in coherent stories that impart meaning and order to our ongoing experience of the world" (p. 35).

Beyond navigation, story/narratives allow us to build bridges to understanding another's point of view: "Narratives are one way to study how people imagine life to be, for themselves and for others" (Brodkey, 1987, p.46), and "One studies stories not because they are true or even because they are false, but for the same reason that people tell and listen to them, in
order to learn about the terms on which others make sense of their lives..."
(p.47).

As one might suspect, anything that allows us to navigate and build is
a powerful tool indeed. Arguments have been forwarded (here by Bruner,
1987) that narratives may even be tied to the way we think:

But logical thought is not the only or even the most ubiquitous mode of
thought... I have been looking at another kind of thought, one that is
quite different in form from reasoning: the form of thought that goes into
the constructing not of logical or inductive arguments but of stories or
narratives. What I want to do now is to extend these ideas about
narrative to the analysis of the stories we tell about our lives: our
"autobiographies" (p. 11).

Moreover, Bruner instructs that the

... memesis between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair: that
is to say, just as art imitates life in Aristotle's sense, so, in Oscar Wilde's,
life imitates art. Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative. 'Life' in this
sense is the same kind of construction of the human imagination as 'a
narrative' is. It is constructed by human beings through active
ratiocination, by the same kind of ratiocination through which we
construct narratives. When someone tells you his [sic] life... it is always
a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of
something univocally given. In the end, it is a narrative achievement (p.
13).

Further:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go
with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for
structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not
only guiding the life narrative up to the present, but directing it into the
future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told...
a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told
and retold (p. 31).

Thus narrative is not only the sea in which we swim, but the very way
we view that sea, make sense of it, explain it to others. Naturally, any tool
this powerful is open to challenge, to manipulation, to exploitation, and stories
are indeed powerful.

Stories create: In “Family narrative as political activity” (Ochs & Taylor,
1992), the “work examines how the family is constituted as a political
institution through conversational interaction” (p. 301), in this case, the stories
families tell around the dinner table.

Stories implement power in the school room:

...the anti narrative bias can also be traced to issues of classroom
power. Rosen (1984) suspects that narrative discourse may be
devalued largely because they are of such common currency: While
everyone comes to the classroom with a gaggle of stories to tell,
narrative is discouraged among the masses, leaving only one ‘chief and
privileged story-teller’ -- the teacher (p. 18). Hymes (1980) argues that,
given narrative’s status as a perfectly acceptable mode of pursuing and
expressing knowledge among co-members of a group, this suppression
of students’ story telling must be seen as an indication of their lesser
status within the school community. The traditional dichotomy of
technical/formal versus narrative language thus finds its roots in social
stratification rather than solid evidence from cognitive psychology...[It

For those who are in a position to control the stories, narratives
themselves are instruments of power:

Stories are narrative devices which do not exist independently of the
ideological meaning formations and power relations within which they
are structured. They are produced by and reproduce these relations,
helping to position subjects within the historical and institutional context
of the material conditions of existence . . . In other words, narratives
punctuate and sequence events in such a way as to privilege a certain
reading of the world... (Mumby, 1987, pp. 125 - 126).

Thus we can see that, beyond the theoretical underpinnings, the
"hows" and the "whys", the one connecting and unbroken thread is that
narratives are important. Stories are central to what it means to be human, and stories are fundamentally a discursive, creative, communicative act.

That given, how can we look at narrative theory in a way that makes sense of all the "Narrative is this" and "Narrative does that" assertions, assumptions and arguments? Ricoeur's theory of narrative has much to offer. The purpose of this paper is NOT to present an in-depth theoretical analysis of Ricoeur's incredible(ly large) corpus of philosophy. It has a far less lofty ambition: to appropriate from Ricoeur three key concepts: appropriation, distanciation, and narrative identity. These become tools for sharing meaning across and through differences, and for looking at narratives constructed in the real world, narratives dealing with domestic violence, told by or about current or former victims, and by entities engaged in struggles to "own" public issues.

**Ricoeur and Narrative**

Ricoeur is a hermeneutist: his concern is with interpretation, and ultimately, how hermeneutics informs our knowledge of what it means to be human, and how narrative (in)forms what we know to be real. Narratives are, in effect, our connection/reflection of our own historicity on many levels: from the grand history that we call "History," to the stories of a culture, to the stories we tell of ourselves and our lives -- our individual placement in relationship to the world, others, and our past. Historicity is important because it "signifies the fundamental and radical fact that we make history, understanding the fact covering the world view of the author," distanciation...
that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings" (Ricoeur, in Thompson, p. 274).

Ricoeur's concern with historicity underlies his three-volume work discussing the relation between narrative and time. More important for the argument of this project, however, are Ricouer's uses of narrative, as informed by his philosophy, for executing hermeneutic analysis. Appropriation, distanciation and narrative identity inform and create Ricoeur's methodology, and are central to his theory of narrative. In brief, narratives are examples of something superficial and far removed from the constitutive of the text and discourse; narratives, as authored communications, form a text.

The objectification of discourse in a structured work [text] does not abolish the first and fundamental feature of discourse, namely that it is constituted by a series of sentences whereby someone says something to someone about something (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p. 138)

The text-as-discourse is addressed, referential, and purposive. Ricoeur spends a great deal of time theorizing historical truth and narrative fiction in terms of "the text." Ricoeur does not differentiate between historical and fictive narratives: both have the same structural features, both are subject to the same interpretive regime. Thus the three interpretive categories of appropriation, distanciation and narrative identity are as appropriate for the analysis of historical narratives as imagined ones. On Ricoeur's grounds, then, the stories of those who have been subjected to domestic abuse are texts open to analysis via the analytic categories of his theory.

As indicated above, Ricoeur posits two essential steps to understanding the text (sharing the world/view of the author): distanciation and appropriation. By distanciation Ricoeur refers to the act of incorporating
and concerning distance in communication, especially between author and
text, text and original audience, and reader/audience and reference world of
the author. In Ricoeur's view, the
text is much more than a particular case of intersubjective
communication: it is the paradigm of distanciation in communication. As
such, it displays a fundamental characteristic of the very historicity of
human experience, namely that it is communication in and through
distance (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p. 131)

Further,
distanciation is not the product of the methodology and hence
something superfluous and parasitical; rather it is constitutive of the
phenomenon of the text as writing. At the same time, it is the condition
of interpretation (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p. 140).

Thompson describes four principle forms of distanciation. The first
involves the surpassing of the event of saying by the inscription of meaning
in writing. The second form concerns the relationship between that inscribed
expression and the original author. Thirdly, distanciation exists between the
inscribed expression – the written text – and the original audience, for “written
discourse is addressed to an unknown audience and potentially anyone who
can read” (Thompson, 1992, p. 15). Finally, distanciation encompasses the
“emancipation” of the text as it moves to a referential dimension of a different
order “a dimension which is unfolded in the process of interpretation” (p. 15).

In sum, distanciation is a recognition of the reality of communication:
that communicators -- in this case, author and reader, both active participants
in discourse -- are separated, temporally, experientially, and in terms of the
historicized world/view they inhabit. This distance makes possible the act of
interpretation, the act of sharing/understanding a(n)other world/view.
Distanciation is a function of our being as communicators in the reality of space/time: if we were not distanciated by space, time, and our historicity/worldview, there would be no need for interpretation, since we would be occupying the same space/time/historicity and worldview. We can only communicate because we ARE distanced.

The counterpart to distanciation is appropriation:

... appropriation is dialectically linked to the distanciation characteristic of writing [it is parallel to the distance between communicators, represented in the separation between author and work]. Distanciation is not abolished by appropriation, but is rather the counterpart of it. Thanks to distanciation [in this case, by writing, or the creation of a text] appropriation no longer has any trace of affective affinity with the intention of the author [we are not required to second-guess and psychologize the intention of the author]. Appropriation is quite the contrary of contemporaneousness and congeniality: it is understanding at and through distance" (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p. 143) [italics and explication mine]

Further:

Ultimately what I appropriate is a proposed world. The latter is not behind the text, as a hidden intention would be, but in front of it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text... It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the proposed world. So understanding is quite different from a constitution of which the subject would possess the key. In this respect, it would be more correct to say that the self is constituted by the 'matter' of the text (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p.143) [italics Ricoeur's]

Appropriation is a matter of textual interpretation and understanding, but, even more, appropriation is that which allows us to engage in the process of expanding our own narrative, of self-interpretation, of increasing our understanding of our own condition. In sharing the world/view, we come to
know the "other". We come to appreciate other modes, other ways of being:
"... appropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of
being ... gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself [sic]" (Ricoeur,

Ricoeur links this understanding of self to understanding of the other:
"It is always through some transfer from Same to Other, in empathy and
imagination, that the Other that is foreign is brought closer" (Ricoeur, 1988,
p.184). We bring this Other closer in the act of appropriation:

By 'appropriation', I understand this: that the interpretation of a text
culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth
understands himself [sic] better, understands himself [sic] differently, or
simply begins to understand himself [sic]. (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992,
p. 158).

Appropriation has an additional, important feature: "One of the aims
of all hermeneutics is to struggle against cultural distance...In this sense,
interpretation [through appropriation] 'brings together', equalizes', renders
'contemporary and similar', thus genuinely making one's own what was
initially alien." (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p.159)

Thus, *appropriation* enables us to enlarge ourselves, to bring together
our individual world/view, our individual narrative, with that of a(n)other.
Through *appropriation* -- and its counterpart, *distanciation* -- we recognize
and acknowledge the distance separating us, but have the means for
narrowing that distance, for interpreting, understanding, and enlarging our
own world/view and narrative through Ricoeur's methodology. "To understand
is not to project oneself into the world of the text; it is to receive an enlarged
self from the apprehension of proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation" (Ricoeur, in Thompson, 1992, p.182)

This is especially important when the key characters are people considered somehow distasteful and/or marginalized: for example, stories told wherein the main character is a victim of domestic violence. If there is ever to be understanding of socially ostracized or undervalued "others", it is Ricoeur's *appropriation* and *distanciation* that will enable and facilitate that learning.

The final piece I am "appropriating" from Ricoeur is the concept of *narrative identity*. At its simplest, narrative identity refers to the act of knowing ourselves from the narratives we tell: "We equate life to the story or stories we tell about it. The act of telling or narrating appears to be the key to the type of connectedness that we evoke when we speak, with Dilthey, of the 'interconnectedness of life'" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 77).

Through the stories we tell, through the act of narrativization we engage in when we create (or the act of appropriation across distance we participate in when we read) a story, through these discursive, communicative, dialogic actions, we come to learn of ourselves and of others, of our reality and the reality of others. The path to self-knowledge and understanding -- the way we create and re-create our identity -- is through narration and the narrative:

The notion of a history or narrative seems to be necessary in order to make sense of the notion of 'self'; for we make sense -- or fail to make sense -- of our lives by the kind of story we can -- or cannot -- tell about it (Dunne, 1995, p. 146)
This narrative identity -- our creation and re-creation of our self through the stories we tell about ourselves, or the creation and re-creation of the characters in the stories/worldviews we appropriate and are appropriated by -- is a discursively constructed, changing, yet essential aspect of our humanity: "The identity of human subjects (individual or collective) is recognized as a perpetual task of reinterpretation in the light of stories we tell ourselves and others" (Kearney, 1995, p. 181). Consequently, and significantly, "... we cannot understand what we do (or what happens to us) apart from our ability to tell stories about it" (Pellauer, 1991, p.59).

We change our view of ourselves -- our constructed-in-narrative identity -- as we appropriate the world/views of others and grow in understanding. Dunne (1995) asserts that as we appropriate narratives, as we come to a new understanding, we change: "the new understanding... to a considerable extent is constitutive of us, is what we are. The stories we tell ourselves make a difference" (p.152).

The stories that we tell, then, like ourselves, are historicized: they are interlocking, woven like a tapestry, into our historical/historicized world.

Further, as we read and appropriate the stories of a (particular) other, we engage in a particular dance: we appropriate, and distanciate, and as we do so, we enlarge ourselves, perhaps changing our own narrative as we accept -- or reject -- the narrative offering of another:

The narrative self is a product of the stories we tell about ourselves and one another from within a living tradition, manifested in a particular historical present, where a narrator and reader configure and refigure these narratives by intervening with the power to speak, hear, tell, record
and recount... For the narrative self of Ricoeur meaning is always emergent as we learn to be the narrator of our life stories (Muldoon, 1991, p.264)

Concerning Feminist Theory and Feminist Organizations

This is of critical importance as we attempt to study how narratives become accepted and adopted by others: as we accept the narratives of others, we change. In sharing our/their narratives, we mutually influence each other. This acceptance of another's story, this appropriation of their narrative and worldview, is practical persuasion in action: it is the act of becoming consubstantial with that Burke theorized.

Finally, for the purposes of analysis, narratives are not fixed, nor is the narrative sense of self: "Narrative identity is something which perpetually makes and unmakes itself" (Kearney, 1995, p.183). As our stories change, our (view of our) self "changes," thus allowing, again, for the view of ourselves as "subjects in process". This has important consequences, philosophically and practically, both for victim/survivors of domestic violence, and for an audience which reads/hears their stories: Ricoeur, theoretically and methodologically, focuses on, and seems to revel in, change. While each individual story might -- indeed must -- have some form of beginning, middle and end, the ability of the reader to appropriate and distanciate -- and change as a result of those actions (by changing his/her own identity) -- means that writing, analyzing, and disseminating the stories of victim/survivors allows for, not only increased understanding of each, but, more profoundly, the possibility that both may read, and in the reading, grow and change. That is indeed a powerful and empowering potential.
It is at this point, the intersection of narratives, power, and voice, that feminist theory, and feminist organizations, become important to this project.

**Concerning Feminist Theory and Feminist Organizations**


Key to understanding feminist organizations is that they are inherently and unashamedly ideological and political cites. Mansbridge tells us that:

The organizational imperatives of the feminist movement and the ways it works with the state, with other progressive movements and with men differs in every country and every locale. Strategies differ by widely varying shades of class, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion and past experience. The only thing we can expect to unite feminists across these differences is internal accountability to a discursively created, self-transforming, internally contested feminist movement (in Ferree and Martin, p. 32).
Reinelt, in her “Moving onto the Terrain of the State: The Battered Women’s Movement and the Politics of Engagement” refers to the “politics of engagement” as

...based on a belief that long-term social change depends on mobilizing and educating women in their communities by creating autonomous institutions, and on establishing relationships and structures of communication with those who work in and set policy for mainstream institutions. (in Ferree and Martin, p.85)

Clearly, Boulder County Safehouse’s vigorous and active outreach, education, and support services, exemplify this effort.

Reinelt also asserts that “Radical feminist ideology profoundly influenced the politics and practices of many early shelters. It defined violence against women not as a personal or family issue but as a political issue”(p. 88).

As we shall see in Chapter 4, it was the radical feminist and grassroots movement that heavily contested for control of the issue of domestic violence in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, this challenge resembled, indeed still resembles, what Katzenstein (in Ferree and Martin,) has described as a discursive politic:

Discursive politics requires greater elucidation. Most succinctly, it is the politics of meaning-making. It is discursive in that it seeks to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practices of society and the state. It is about cognition. Its premise is that conceptual changes directly bear upon material ones. Discursive politics relies heavily but not exclusively on language. Its vehicle is both speech and print --- conversations, debate, conferences, essays, stories, newsletters and books. (p. 35)
Again, Safehouse exemplifies these vernacular, discursive attempts to frame the issue. Moreover, its current actions, as we will examine further in Chapter Six, reveal its radical roots, as exemplified in Arnold’s description:

The more radical activists advocated fundamental change in the social and material conditions that support male domination and violence against women. They held that battered women’s movement programs should foster alternative feminist communities based on grass-roots, self-help activity, both to challenge existing social relations of power and to enable women’s own self-empowerment and autonomy. The radicals articulated multiple demands, including not only improved services for battered women but also economic equality for all women and an end to the racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia from which women suffer. As part of this broad-based program to improve the condition of all women, the radicals advocated and actively sought alliances with other dispossessed social movement groups (in Ferrer and Martin, p. 279).

In Chapter Six we will see how Boulder County Safehouse initiates dialog and attempts to extend ownership to the issue of social justice which includes active resistance to other social injustices including, but not limited to, racism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, ethnocentrism, discrimination against “illegal” aliens, and class discrimination. Their voice as advocate attempts to create discursive space for a majority of society’s victims, extending beyond the parameters of domestic battery.

**Summary and Conclusion**

This dissertation, then, stands at the intersection of rhetoric, publics, feminist and narrative theory. It is informed by the insights of Bruner, Fraser, Gusfield, Hauser, Ricoeur, and diverse feminist organizational scholars. The employment of the various perspectives allows for a rich view of the ways narratives are used to provide voice, create identification, call a public, present arguments, and, ultimately, establish ownership of the contested
issue of domestic violence as it is constructed, and reconstructed, in the forum of publics and public opinion.
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTING THE "PURE VICTIM"

Introduction

Rhetoricians, and other observers, view the formation of public issues and publics as contentious. While it may seem simpleminded and redundant to speak of the journey from private to public problem as long and difficult, what does hold interest is the development of the issue: what are divisions which occurred as claimants fought to establish the issue and "own" it? To that end, this chapter will look at the beginnings of the domestic violence (or "battered women's") movement; those parties who clearly fought for control of the issue; attempts to socially construct the "victim" and assign responsibility and blame. For that we will rely heavily on Gusfield. We will also look at an artifact, an Oscar winning documentary, which debuted in 1994, but is still widely used by Safehouse and shelters as an educational tool that presents domestic violence to new publics: to those who seek information. Finally, we will examine the tactics used to call a public into being around the issue of domestic violence: the ways women's stories construct "good reasons" for acceptance and action.

A Historical Retrospective of Issue Definition and Ownership

As previously mentioned, concerns over the presence and consequences of domestic violence arose out of the 1960s and 70s women's movement and consciousness raising. These were the first groups to name
the issue, and the issue continues to be viewed by many as a women's or feminist concern. Part of the action that followed — making the personal political? — was to establish shelters. The earliest shelters were staffed by volunteers, and funded by donations. Much of the “counseling” which took place was peer counseling: by women who had been abused, or who were members of the women's movement particularly supportive of battered women. The goal was “empowerment” — allowing and encouraging women to free themselves from their abuser and the abusive situation. In many analyses, this group and time is referred to as the “grassroots” movement.

In short order, the need for services soon outgrew the volunteers and donations available. More light was being shed upon the problem, and public involvement required public accountability. Davies (1998) states: “The tensions between the volume and complexity of battered women’s needs and available institutional responses have also highlighted debates and conflicts among advocates and other practitioners that have existed since the beginning of the battered women’s movement” (p. 11). As supporters turned to local governments and organizations for funding sources, requirements for fiscal accountability, along with the concurrent bureaucratic rules, often saw “trained” staff replace volunteers. The “trained” staff members were frequently social workers, counselors, and mental health professionals. These individuals brought different insights, expectations, and theoretical perspectives into the shelters and the movement. Of more critical importance...
is that they had a different picture of the victim, and different explanations of causality for domestic violence. The contest for ownership had begun.

**Of Grassroots and Professionals**

Davies describes the split in the movement as between "grassroots," and "professionals":

The grassroots approach emphasized supportive, "empowering" responses offered by counselors or advocates who saw themselves as the battered woman's peers. The professional approach was closer to a familiar, office-based, individual counseling or therapy model; it was often seen by advocates as more judgmental and less egalitarian than the grassroots approach. (1998, p. 13)

An immediate consequence of the struggle for control could be seen in the impact on the individual battered woman, as those who viewed domestic violence as relational dysfunction often called the battered woman to account: "...a woman's decision to remain in the relationship with her abuser was often regarded, particularly by professionals, as an indication that she was unable to make decisions in her own interest" (Davies, p. 14). In these lights, not only is a woman abused, she may be subtly complicit in her own victimization. Further, and of critical importance to battered mothers, she might also be judged mentally incapable of making decisions to benefit herself, and thus deemed unfit to care for her children.

The importance of this division, and the ramifications of the outcome as both parties attempt to control the issue, cannot be understated, for the division echoes still-contentious efforts to control the issue and assign responsibility. Even in 2003, there are those who argue that domestic violence is a function of interpersonal relational dynamics and dysfunctions,
thus locating responsibility for solution in the individual and his/her relationship, in counseling and under the assumption of individual responsibility. Others, and this includes feminists and supporters of the battered women’s movement, argue that the cause is societal, often labeled “patriarchy” and that the problem needs to be confronted and remedied on a societal level – it is a public problem. Clearly the locus of the problem is critical to the remediation required.

In the society of the 1970s and 80s, when shelters were being formed and advocates were demanding action, the “sides” that fought for control of the issue were becoming more clearly drawn. On one “side” were the empathic volunteers and peer counselors, most of them drawn from the women’s movement and, as a result, at least partially politically motivated. Their claim, of societal cause and thus societal remediation, defines the issue as a public problem. On the other “side” were mental health professionals, social workers, and administrators, whose causal attribution was personal dysfunction, and whose remediation was firmly lodged in the private realm: individual counseling and personal responsibility.

While the volunteers had passion and commitment and belief on their side, the professionals had credibility, visibility, status, and the advantage in that they were already part of the system: they were the people who made the diagnoses that counted, who could refer, who could speak with authority on funding matters. While both groups rightfully focused on the severity of the
issue and the need for treatment, the "winner" would shape the issue in the court of public opinion.

The clinical/professional interpretations of the issue gained traction as the issue commanded more public attention:

Shelter programs relied on dedicated volunteers and staff who did not demand large salaries for their work. Most operated from self-help, peer support models of intervention. From the beginning of the work with battered women, however, approaches espoused by more therapeutically oriented professionals were also advocated. As time went on, these clinical understandings of battered women's behavior and decision making gained popularity both within and outside the movement. (Davies, 1998, p. 14)

Schecter (1982, in Davies, 1998), provides examples of the development of the "mentally ill" victim:

In approaching funders and community groups, activists encountered charitable and professional values that emphasized helping the "needy" and often unwittingly assigned to women the permanent status of helpless "victim." The pervasive influence of psychological explanations for social problems was seen as funding agency after funding agency defined battered women as a mental health issue. (p. 15).

At this point, advocates had to aggressively attempt to take control of the issue:

... advocates needed to focus some of their energies on convincing the public and policymakers that battering was a serious problem that affected many women from all walks of life. Supportive resources were limited; policies did not recognize that battering was a social, not individual "family" problem; and popular understandings often cast battered women as masochists who "asked" for the violence they experienced. Advocates needed to construct a public image of "the battered woman" who was more sympathetic. (Davies, 1998, p. 15).
The Rhetorical Construction of the "Battered Woman"

With growing public awareness of the issue of battered women, and with public attribution focusing on mental illness as a cause, it became imperative that battered women not be blamed for their victim status. Mental illness was, and remains, a social stigmatization. Chief in importance for many of the women was the very real concern that, as both "victim" and "mentally ill" they would far more likely be judged unfit to raise their children, and for many women concern for their children was, and remains, a reason for leaving an abusive relationship. Davies tells us that, "As part of their effort to generate broad-based support, advocates publicly emphasized a model of battered women as 'pure victims'" (1998, p. 15).

Of central importance here is that there was "public emphasis" on a model of battered women, a model designed to construct the women in a particular way: not just as "victims" (because, after all, the mentally ill can also be "victims" but not necessarily sympathetic ones), but as "pure victims," as victims who are somehow blameless in their victimization. The model has four parts, as presented in Davies (1998). We will examine each in terms of the rhetorical exigence to which each attempts to respond.

While violence is traditional and socially acceptable "only" in response to physical threat and injury, violent actions performed by women are arguably less commonplace and/or acceptable, and a mother who murders the father of her children might widely be held to be "crazy." To answer that charge, and assert that the woman is indeed sane, not the "mentally ill" designation assigned by health-care professionals, Davies tells us that the model holds "First, abused women are not themselves violent, unless driven to violence in self-defense" (1998, p. 15). Thus, the woman is acting sanely,
to protect herself, and not irrationally, or in response to imaginary slights: She
is sane.

Another question presents itself: what justifies her violence? Does one
"mistake" on the part of the husband allow women carte blanche to perpetrate
violence? Again, the "pure victim" model answers that question as it asserts
that women have experienced repeated, gross physical violence, as well as
emotional abuse. Davies cites the model: "Second, battered women are
characterized as having experienced extreme physical violence separated by
periods of emotional abuse" (1998, p. 15). The "pure victim" not only acts in
legitimate self defense, but she has been subjected to intense abuse, both
emotional and physical. She is sane, although she has suffered beyond
"normal" experiences.

Still another question presents itself: why couldn't the couple just work
it out? Isn't it, after all, just between intimate partners? Proponents of the
model point out that "[Thirdly] the abuse is presented as a pattern of events
that necessarily increase in severity and frequency, and that will only get
worse unless someone intervenes" (Davies, 1998, p. 15). Lenore Walker
(1979, 1984) widely cited as an authority on Battered Women's Syndrome
and expert on the "Cycle of Violence" has argued repeatedly from her
research that barring intervention, violence escalates, often to the point of the
abuser killing the abused. Moreover, intervention must usually be on the part
of police and the courts, as marital counseling is seldom successful once
physical battering has begun. Thus the assertion is made that there is an
inevitability about the (escalating) violence, that the woman herself is
incapable of stopping it; it requires third-party intervention. The inevitability of
escalation and the requirement of intervention once again serve to assert that
there is nothing the woman herself could have done. Any rational human in
this situation would face the same results. It is not that she is insane, just a
victim.

One final commonly asked question remains: well, didn't she ask for it?
If she doesn't somehow enjoy the situation, why does she stay? Since
physical violence and emotional abuse are involved, most would agree that any woman who "enjoyed" the situation could be labeled as mentally ill. Perhaps to counter this charge, Davies reveals the fourth and final component of the "pure victim model;" "Finally, battered women are described as terrified by this experience" (1998, p. 15). Thus it is their terror, not their mental incompetence or desire for suffering, that keeps them in the situation.

In sum, the "pure victim" model was a public presentation, on the part of the grassroots activists, to gain and maintain control of the issue of domestic abuse. Specifically, there was a public attempt to rhetorically construct the battered woman as a "pure victim" who was neither insane nor complicit in her victimization. Rather, she is a woman who engages in violence only in self-defense; one who has experienced severe physical battery and emotional abuse; who cannot break free of the cycle of inevitably escalating violence without outside intervention; and one who is terrorized by the life she lives with her abuser.

A documentary film, which premiered in 1993, provides an excellent example of the presentation of victims of domestic violence who meet the model's criteria and presents graphic public evidence of "pure victims." The video is still used, in 2004, by Boulder County Safehouse, in educational outreach presentations.

The "Pure Victim" Enacted: Defending Our Lives as Text

In 1994, a 42-minute video won the Academy Award for documentary. The movie was titled Defending Our Lives. It is about battered women, and the state of domestic violence in America. The focus is on the state of Massachusetts, and the voices of six women, five of whom provide narrative accounts of their experiences and actions, the sixth serves to read a list, or chronicle, of murdered victims. From narratives provided by the five, the
viewer can appropriate "good reasons" offered for accepting victims' view of the issue and its consequences.

The documentary itself consists of three "threads." The first thread begins with the opening credits: A woman's voice narrates a series of black and white photos of beaten women. We later learn that the narrator is Sarah Buel, "Assistant District Attorney, Suffolk County Domestic Violence Unit." She is presenting data and information to an audience at Harvard Law School. Ms. Buel provides expert testimony, as she is the primary source for statistics, education, and organizational credibility in the film. She also tells stories. Her chilling opening speech sets the mood for the film:

They are punched, kicked, they are beaten while trying to hold on to their babies. They are strangled, choked, burned with cigarettes; doused with kerosene and lighter fluid and set on fire. They are run over by cars and trucks, they have their teeth knocked out with hammers, they are raped with hot curling irons and large objects; they are stabbed with everything from knives to ice picks to screwdrivers — anything that penetrates. They are forced to watch the torture of their family members; their children are forced to watch their assault and torture, and they’re often tied up and forced to watch the torture and molestation of their own children. Am I describing atrocities committed in some foreign country? By soldiers in a country at war? Am I describing atrocities about which Amnesty International and other human rights organizations are writing to you and pleading for money? I'm describing domestic violence as it occurs in America. Yes, there is a war against women and children in this country.

After the opening credits, we are introduced to a woman who personifies the second thread. Meekah Scott, credited with being a "Community Educator, Battered Women Fighting Back!" is speaking to an audience in the "Battered Women and Self-Defense Conference" at Harvard Law School. Scott is a black woman, dressed somewhat informally in what
looks to be a sweat suit. She reading a chronological lists of names and
dates: “January 7, Lana Gilbert…February 13, Regina McGee…”
Interspersed with her naming of the victim, and the circumstances of her
death, are videos of police and ambulances, of men being lead away in
handcuffs, of bodybags being removed from houses. Scott tells no stories:
 she simply lists victims, perpetrators, and sometimes details of the crime.
Scott appears four times, and hers is the last voice we hear before the closing
credits.

The third thread is the most obviously narrative as we meet four
women, two black and two white. They tell us stories of their abusive
relationships. They are neither strikingly beautiful nor ugly. They appear
well-groomed, and are, for the most part, soft-spoken. Each woman is
apparently speaking from a different room: none of the women are shown
together, the camera focuses on their faces as they relate their narratives.
Their names are Patty Hennessey, Shannon Booker, Eugenia Moore, and
Lisa Grimshaw. The audience learns, near the end of the film, that all four
women are in prison in the state of Massachusetts, for the murder of their
abuser. What follows are successions of stories from each of the four
women: how she met her abusive partner; the progression of the relationship;
the beginning and scope of the abuse suffered; her attempts to respond to the
violence, including actively seeking intervention from police; the eventual
murder of her abuser; the legal ramifications, including the sentence handed
to each woman by the Massachusetts court system; and finally what "society" should learn from her tale.

The documentary has two motifs; the first is the interweaving of the threads: narrative, list, statistics; narratives, list, statistics; narratives, list. The second is the focus on first-person narrative accounts offered by victims who survived the abuse. The stories offered by the four women, and later by Buel, provide a picture of the reality of domestic violence that serves to present the victims as suffering but sane, and at the same time, offer universally understandable good reasons for their behavior, reasons that are still advanced today by Safehouse volunteers. They also, through the prisoner's stories and Buel's ethos, are a clear attempt to claim ownership and assign political responsibility. Finally, from beginning narrative through concluding silent presentation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the metaphor of war – war on women and children, women as prisoners, thus women as prisoners of war – is an awesome rhetorical construction.

The interspersing of the four women's tales is masterfully contrasted with Scott's matter-of-fact listing of dates and victims, with corresponding crime scene coverage. Buel is the uber-weaver as she provides the perfect link between Scott's lists and the stories of the women. At some point, we become aware that the four women are indeed in prison for the murder of their abusers. We are not given that information at the beginning. Scott's credentials are present, as are Buel's, but the women's stories speak for them.
Asserting Claims and Ownership: The Pure Victim

Remembering the model Davies provided, as constructed and publicized by grassroots advocates, and its list of four characteristics of the pure victim, it is immediately apparent that the four prisoners, and to some extent Buel, are almost made-to-order examples of pure victims. Criteria one is that abused women are not themselves violent, unless driven to violence in self-defense. Each woman’s story makes clear that violence was her last choice. Each had attempted to leave, sometimes successfully, but the abuse continued until she fought back, defending her life.

Shannon shares the battery she experienced at the hands of her abuser:

Jose used to punch me. He would stomp me, drag me, drag me to the point where the meat in my knees was dug out of my kneecaps. He would beat me with billy-clubs, any type of object that he could put his hands on he would beat me with. And it didn’t matter where it was, he would beat me...

She continues the description and offers a “good reason” that she tolerated the violence: “...so I never thought of turning him in because from my background, I come from an abusive background I’ve always thought it was OK for me to accept this type of abuse, you know, as a child.” Thus Shannon is not only a victim, but one who was predisposed, because of her childhood experiences, to expect that kind of treatment as “normal.”
Eugenia similarly reveals examples of abuse at the hands of her abuser:

When I told him that he couldn't ride, all of a sudden he was standing over me, looking down, talking and he spit in my face. And I took and I wiped, and I said "Look what you doing --why are you always doing this to me?" And so after this, after I wiped that off, I got ready to stand up because he was hitting me again, and that's when I tried to grab him. I tried to grab him and bring him to me, that's when he took and he punched me in my stomach...

Eugenia continues, immediately offering evidence that she could not have stopped the violence herself: "I mean there was like five or six of us trying to hold him: he was wild, all over the place, throwing blows at people: they were ducking they couldn't hold him."

Patty graphically describes the last time she was abused by her then-husband, prior to leaving:

So I just gathered myself together and I ran, kept running to my mother's house, and I finally got up the driveway and he was right behind me. And I got in the house and I shut the door and I just slid down the door and my mother was in the standing in the kitchen and she started screaming. I guess there was blood all over the wall -- all over the door, I had blood all over my face from goin' through the bushes and stuff and him hitting me.

The story continues with Patty offering her own "good reasons" for leaving: "I never went back after that. That was the last night. When it came to he almost killed my son, too, I just couldn't deal with that. For the next seven years it was a constant everyday struggle to keep him away from me." She left for the sake of her son, but even leaving did not stop the abuse.
Lisa talks about beatings while she was pregnant, and her attempts to protect herself:

I got pregnant with Chad, he would hit me but I wouldn’t, I just wouldn’t let him hit me in the stomach. I really would try not to let him hit me anywhere near the baby. So at different times there were a couple of teeth knocked out from punches...

Thus all four women were victims of battery, victims who did nothing to initiate the violence. Rather, each woman narrates incidents which allow the viewer to see her as rational, as having reasons for her action, as attempting to avoid victimization.

The "Pure Victim" Criteria Two: Physical and Emotional Abuse

Criteria two of the “pure victim” is that battered women are characterized as having experienced extreme physical violence, separated by periods of emotional abuse. Again, the women’s narratives detail examples of physical torture, and the resulting emotional devastation.

Lisa describes how, beyond the physical torture, her husband would leave her imprisoned. After sodomizing her “He left me tied up on the bed for hours, leaving me there...” The helplessness and isolation can not help but speak for the added emotional devastation of such treatment.

Shannon shares examples of public humiliation and isolation that went beyond even the physical beatings:

He would beat me up in front of his friends to impress his friends. It got to the point where he started isolating me. He wanted to know my whereabouts and a lot of the time he didn’t want me to go nowhere unless he was there.
Eugenia adds to the pictures painted by Lisa and Shannon when she tells of abuse that occurred at her place of employment, and the emotional pain she felt:

I couldn't believe what was happening. I was so embarrassed, I was so ashamed. This was on my job. This had happened on the streets before and people had intervened, but this was on the job I didn't know if I was going to get fired or what...

Finally, Patty poignantly describes the emotional devastation of continued abuse. She explains how the continued abuse erodes self-esteem, and that love for her son was her salvation the night that she left Brian:

At that point my attitude was: Do whatever you want to me, but don't touch my kid. My kid meant everything to me. So the night I left, that was a lot with it. I know I should have been caring about my own life but I didn't, at that point I didn't. They get you to the point where you feel like you're not worth anything and you don't even deserve to live...

In other words, the pure victim's physical abuse extends to control, separation, and isolation that present a combination of violence altering with emotional abuse. The unwritten subtext is that they, again, did not provoke the violence, nor did they deserve the emotional assaults. As Patty indicates, sometimes “they get you to the point where you feel like you're not worth anything...” That, however, is not necessarily a less-than-sane response to continued emotional deprivation and abuse. Even feeling worthless did not stop Patty from leaving her abuser.

**Criteria Three: Increasing Violence**

Thirdly, according to the “pure victim” model, the abuse is presented as a pattern of events that necessarily increase in severity and frequency, and that will only get worse unless someone intervenes. The women tell stories of
that escalating severity, beginning with their first, positive impressions of their batterer. It is particularly disturbing when pregnancy is involved.

Patty describes her initial meeting with Brian, and the ensuing start, and escalation, of violence:

While we were dating everything was fine, he was sweet, he was kind --
everything I thought I wanted a man to be, someone I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. After we got married, everything changed. He became a completely different person, and for 10 long years he abused me. Sexually, physically, emotionally....

[Later]: When I told him I was pregnant he punched me in the stomach, started slapping me, shoving me up against the wall, telling me he didn’t want this responsibility, how could I do this to him. He just became very violent all the time. Slapping me, pushing me calling me names.

Notice that, even though Brian became violent, it was a violence that began after they were married. Here we see the beginning of “good reasons” offered for becoming involved with a batterer: he wasn’t one when she fell in love with him. We will see similar stories from all the women, which, while the examples still serve to highlight the increasing cycle(s) of violence, also present compelling arguments that the women did not knowingly become involved with abusive men: they were neither abnormal, nor mentally deviant.

Eugenia’s story is similar to Patty’s. Alfred seemed to be the answer to a somewhat lonely woman’s dream. Note that Eugenia was aware that the sweetness might not last. Nothing in her story, however, indicates that she “asked for” or courted abuse, yet she was still caught in a cycle of escalating violence:

When I met him it was just like the answer. He was polite, he opened doors for me, he catered to me, he waited on me, it was just so sweet. I
knew that it was a lot of put-on, too because we had just gotten together....

[Later]: And one day when I didn't expect him --we had been arguing, he had fought me in the street just prior to that, the day before, --he would take and he showed up at the train station one day and it was no surprise because he was popping up everywhere and I didn't realize at the time he was tracking me, so when he showed up and says “well can I go to work with you?” and I said “no look at what you just did to me this morning, look at what you did to me last night. All this violence everywhere we go and making a big scene everywhere we go.”

Shannon also tells a story of love and romance. If one were to read only the second sentence (“I met him...) it would seem like any woman's romance. Again, it moves from romance to escalating battery:

My batterer's name was Jose. I met him in 1987, and as our relationship started out it was nice, you know, he sported with me, escorted me with nice pretty cars and jewelry and clothes, buying gifts for my daughter and everything. For about six months the relationship was fine until one day, we was at the Gallery, which is a club in Boston, came home from the Gallery and that's when the abuse started. He socked me in my face. I had a black eye, and from that day the abuse became —frantic.

Finally, Lisa tells a tale of escalating jealousy and violence. In her case, the timely intervention of a third party might well have saved her life —this time:

With Tommy, it was fine at the beginning, and then he started being obsessive and jealous, and then accusing me. I was trying to work two jobs, and I was working two jobs, he was going to school. He would say “you're going to work to look good for somebody else” that's what he would accuse me of... [Later:] I just was hammering my windows closed because I thought he was going to come in the door and he did, he busted through the door. He came through and took the hammer off of the table because I ran, and he started hitting me with it. There were some teeth knocked out, I was hit in the back, I was hit in the--- I don't really remember where I was hit but there was blood everywhere. His friend was there and I'm lucky that his friend was there because if he wasn't, he would have killed me that night there was no doubt in my mind I would not be here.
The “Pure Victim” Criteria Four: Terror

And finally, as “pure victims” the battered women are described as terrified by this experience. Some of the four refer to the terror and name it, while others provide narrative examples of the experience.

Eugenia tells her abuser “...I know you aren’t here to ride the bus, you’re here to terrorize me and to show me you can do this because this is public transportation.”

Shannon describes routine acts of terror that escalated until the acts that occurred immediately before she killed her abuser:

I started packing my stuff and he came upstairs and me and him started tussling and arguing and stuff and I told him, I said “just let me pack my stuff I’m gonna leave and I won’t come back.” And he told me he said “Bitch, before you leave, I’ll kill you.” Now he had threatened me several times. He has put guns in my mouth, guns to my head, and played like Russian roulette with me, putting the gun in my mouth and clicking the trigger and stuff. And anytime he told me that he was going to kill me I believed him to a certain extent, but this night it was more fearful than ever. You know the expression on his face was like a real cold expression...

A pregnant Lisa describes her fear as Tommy threatened to kill her baby. Remember that Lisa has been brutalized by Tommy before, even while pregnant, and has reason to believe he will hurt her and the baby:

One time, I think I was about 6 months pregnant, and he threw me down on the bed we had been arguing and he said he was going to cut the baby out of my stomach because he just wanted to do it. And I really felt he was going to do this to the baby, and I was very scared.

Patty describes a form of terrorism that any mother could relate to. Previously she described that, even though she left Brian, she spent seven
years trying to keep him out of her life, and protect her son from his abuse. At this point in time, Brian had received permission to take Timmy out of state:

Brian told me that I'd never see Timmy again. He told me that he'd kill me if I didn't give him Timmy. I was afraid for my life and for Tim's life. Brian showed up early. He came up the steps and he was laughin'. He said “You better kiss Timmy goodbye, because you're never gonna' see him again.” And I went in the house and I just started freakin' out. I didn't know what to do. I knew if I came back outside and told him “No, Tim’s not here, you’re not getting him” he would kill me. I knew he was going to kill me that day. I mean, he had told me so...

**Of Pure Victims' Good Reasons**

All the women's stories offer good reasons to accept that these women are not abnormal, that they are not violence prone, that they did not seek out their victimization, that they did meet charming men who led them to believe that they were entering into “normal” relationships, that physical battery and emotional abuse escalated, and that they were terrorized and in fear for their lives. In short, while we might not applaud all their choices, they are not “mentally ill.”

Moreover, the women's stories correspond to already-public theories of domestic violence (Walker's aforementioned “Battered Women's Syndrome,” the cycle of violence, as well as the “pure victim”) which allows them to symbolically plead and make an argument for the reality experienced in this country, by battered women. Lisa, Shannon, Patty and Eugenia become representatives of any and all victims.

While it is not apparent in the aforementioned analysis, which did not follow chronological order, the four women's narratives in the movie begin with each telling the story of meeting and becoming involved with their
abuser. The stories themselves move in order, from meeting, to commitment, to the beginning of violence, to attempts to understand it, to pleas to law enforcement for assistance, to terror and ultimately murder. In the course of the telling, the viewer begins to see each woman as unique, as individual, as very real, as rational.

They not only voice their stories, but become, for us, the individual faces that personalize statistics: they illustrate the tragedy of the individuals, not the facelessness of the masses. They present narratives that make their experience real, tangible, poignant, and allow us to potentially understand, if not approve of, the reasons they acted to murder their abusers. They are not mentally ill, and to accept their narratives is to accept the grassroots framing of the women as, indeed, “pure victims.”

Thus, in degrees great and small, the four women present themselves, in their own words, as confirming to Davies (1998) description of “pure victims.” But that is not the end of the claims advanced by and in the movie.

**Claims Supported: Statistics and Evidence**

Buel provides statistics and evidence that further support the grave danger faced by victims:

The Center for Disease Control has even come to understand, through their Violence Epidemiology Unit, that more women now seek treatment in our nation’s emergency rooms as a result of domestic violence injuries than from the combination of muggings, rapes and car accidents. ...That domestic violence constitutes the number one cause of injury to women in America. They also tell us that women are in nine times more danger in their own home than they are in the street. ... The FBI tells us one out of every two women will be in a violent relationship in their lifetime.
... A Texas study recently showed that 75% of the women currently in shelters had left at least several times previously. It is a myth that we do not leave. We generally leave many times before we are finally able to leave and stay away.

... The New York Legal Aid Society documented, in their study of New York state, that battered women who kill are mistreated at every juncture in the criminal justice system: they have higher initial bails set, they are detained longer, and ultimately have higher sentences than any other kind of defendant, including serial rapists and murderers.

In short, the evidence from the testimony of victims and narrator not only supports that the women are pure victims, but also provides good reasons, through statistics and studies, that they rightfully perceive themselves to be in danger, and that the resources available to them are not sufficient protection.

**Additional Claims and Assertions of Public Ownership**

As aforementioned, the movie presents several claims, each with public and rhetorical significance. Good reasons are provided, through narratives, that frame the women as, quite literally, tortured but sane, pushed to extreme action after all other courses of action have failed, motivated by the necessity of survival, or for the love of their children. Many of these claims are also claims asserting ownership of an issue: we will look to Gusfield to see how these claims meet his criteria. Further, these claims, when used as educational resources, can be viewed as vernacular discourse attempting to call and respond to a public.

Remember that in Chapter Three we discussed Gusfield’s theory of public problems; a problem exists only when it is brought before the public. Owners are those individuals (or sometimes groups) who are seen in public
and by the public, as authorities on the issue: their voices are heard, they
carry weight; they can assign causal responsibility. In short, owners frame
the issue, they rhetorically construct the salient parameters, causes, blame,
and remediation. We have seen that there was a marked and important
struggle waged between grassroots advocates and professionals, over,
literally, the face of (victims of) domestic violence.

Gusfield tells us that, in its relationship to power, the ownership of an
issue has four similarities to the ownership of property. Those qualities are
control, exclusiveness, transferability, and potential for loss. We can see in
the struggle over construction of a “pure” victim how claimants attempt to
exercise those characteristics.

The Battle for Control

The battle for control can be seen in the attempt to portray the victim
as “not mentally ill. The women are not violent, except in self-defense. They
are not insane: they have endured extreme physical abuse AND emotional
abuse. They are rational enough to be terrified by their experience. These
women have endured horrific abuse, but are not themselves abusive; they are
truly “victims” trapped in a pattern that they cannot break. This portrayal
becomes crucial for, if grassroots advocates cannot control the presentation
of the victim as sane but suffering, two serious consequences result: the
locus of the problem moves from societal to interpersonal, and women are
deprived of what any would list as their primary reason for leaving the abusive
situation—their children.
Controlling the issue is absolutely imperative for the grassroots advocates. They must be able to assert the reality of the victim's experience. If the issue is seen as intrapersonal, as mental illness, it then becomes societal only in that society might feel responsible to provide more individual counseling. The problem itself would remain in the private realm – within the family, or between a woman and her therapist. Similarly, if the issue is a function of interpersonal dynamics, of dysfunctional relationships, the issue again remains “private” as the cherished ideals of democracy and freedom preempt government intervention in the most sacred and private of places: the home, between a man and his wife. It would be hard to imagine a hotter political potato than advocating governmental interference between a man and woman.

Finally, and by no means least in importance, advocates have experienced women staying in horrific situations because the women know that their children will be negatively impacted, at the barest minimum financially, by the consequences of their leaving the (usually primary wage earning) spouse or partner. If the victim is perceived as mentally unstable, one of her primary reasons for leaving – to protect the children from an abusive situation – becomes moot as courts tend to frown upon awarding custody to mentally ill parents, especially when the mentally ill patient may have no marketable job skills, etc. Make no mistake, those advocates fighting for control of the issue are literally fighting what they believe to be a life-and-
death battle for the women and children. We will see later that they even go so far as to adopt the war metaphor: it is a war against women and children.

**The Battle for Exclusiveness**

The struggle for exclusiveness persists as one group attempts to “own” the issue to the exclusion of competing viewpoints. In this case, the grassroots/feminist claimants are attempting to preempt the growing “professional” view of domestic violence as a personal problem, as an internal mental illness. The victim must be seen as sane and a victim, not as a masochistic incompetent. The discourse must be vernacular, not the jargonistic language of the clinician.

Having asserted that the narratives were vernacular, let me immediately cast them in the opposite discourse, that of the clinician: Four women, two African-American and two Caucasian, present symptoms of depression and anger. All four of the clients showed marked lack of self esteem pursuant to engaging in relationships where one-up dynamics favored alleged perpetrators...

Compare that discourse with the narratives shared with the audience, recall the stories of Lisa, Eugenia, Shannon and Patty.³ Each woman presented first-person accounts of what was, quite simply, her life, her experience of reality. Each woman led us through a portion of her autobiography, each begins as any story: Once, long ago, “I met Brian when I was 11…” We walk with each woman through the deterioration of what had

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³ For further examples, please see appendix B, transcript of dialog.
seemed a wonderful and exciting relationship. We see the joyful event of a pregnancy turned into a nightmare of assaults and pain. We see women who reached out for help, who called police, who left their abuser, who attempted to end the relationship, only to be hunted, haunted by one who had seemed the light of their lives. We see women who did everything "right" to end their waking nightmare, to protect themselves and their children, only to find that the police didn't help, the courts didn't help, and that they all -- from police to courts to family to the women themselves -- seemed powerless to stop the pain, to make the terror go away. As we walk each step, from dream to nightmare, we come closer to understanding the terror the women felt. We cannot deny their reality.

No clinical jargon is used to explain their pain. There is no attempt to rely on psychological mechanisms to explain the everyday terror of a woman -- of these four women -- struggling for power over her own life, for safety and protection for herself and her child. Instead, we --- men and women alike --- follow that narrative, and by virtue of the shared discourse enter into a world whose condition threatens, by its empirical realities, to render women powerless. Having entered her world, we are asked to accept, both empathically and rationally, that the women were forced to act, to respond to violence, to protect their children, to defend their lives.

Thus narrative reaches to persuade in a manner that clinician's jargon cannot. And accepting the good reasons and rationality presented, we can conclude that the women were, indeed, not mentally ill, not insane, not
grossly deviant. There is logic and rationality present in the victim. She is victimized by circumstances, not her own incompetence or personal failings. She is, indeed, a “pure victim.” And that is what she must be, what she is rhetorically constructed to be. There is no room for compromise on this picture because the stakes are high and the goal is the exclusive right to speak as owner: the grassroots version must triumph and the clinical analysis must lose its right to address the issue.

Moreover, the feminist involvement usually does not go unopposed, as competing claimants attempt to deny that it is a societal problem, specifically responding to the feminists attributions of patriarchy as causal. Once again, unless the problem is seen as systemic – as societally encouraged and reified notions of patriarchal control – the issue will be adjudged a “private” one and again disappear into the protected realm of the home.

Transferability and Potential for Loss

The issue of transferability, at this point, assumes importance as the grassroots organizers challenge a view that is already ahead and gaining traction: the therapeutic model. The grassroots advocates must make sure the public perception of ownership is transferred to their model of domestic violence.

The potential for loss is the shadow that haunts the advocates as their mission is to save lives. Should they lose, should their position be seen as invalid, not in control, not able to speak, to assign responsibility and blame, should domestic violence continue to be seen as private realm....it is a battle
they must win and over which they must retain control. Also, in classic debate and argumentation terms, that status quo has presumption. They literally must move the issue from the shelter of the private, and overthrow the current view of domestic violence as a familial issue. These women are seeking to push a very large boulder up a very steep hill, and once they attain the summit, they cannot afford to lose control of the issue, or it, and they, and the women they represent, will once again sink into a valley of obscurity, in the realm of the private

**Making the Issue a Public Issue**

For Gusfield, an issue becomes a matter for public concern when key elements have been met. First, the issue must be seen as “real”: it must have both facticity and remediability before it will be of public concern. The issue must also have moral consequences that are apparent to the greater public as congruent with his/her/their moral beliefs. The aforementioned statistics and studies provided by Buel contribute to the audience’s awareness of the real existence of the problem, but perhaps even more immediately impactful is Scott’s straightforward recitation of lists: the list of the deceased women, in chronological order, with their age, hometown and murderer’s name provided. The lists are intercut with videos and pictures of the victims being removed in bodybags or ambulances, of their accused murderer being led away by police, and, in one instance, pictures of a funeral procession and a victim in a coffin. The pictures presented also serve to give “statistics” a face. They serve as a visual narrative to make the compelling argument: this is real, this
is life in Massachusetts, these are the real-life casualties in a war against women and children.

**Facticity and Remediability**

Gusfield posits that it is not enough to merely accept that a situation or problem exists. It must also be remediable: there must be a potential for a cure. As he describes in *The Culture of Public Problems*, both old age and racial injustice can be viewed as “real” issues, but racial injustice can be seen as potentially remediable in a way that old age cannot. Buel represents the fact that there is a possible hope for the victim, for Buel survived and, moreover, she serves as a credible source of information:

> It has been fifteen years now since I found myself a battered woman on welfare, at a time when there were no abuse prevention laws, no shelters, DA s, judges, police that I could find that were at all concerned about my safety, the safety of my then-infant son and the two foster children I had.

She has redeemed herself, moved from victim to survivor, and her constant presence not only asserts the potential for remedies, but offers some concrete steps. When confronted with the reality of women being unfairly treated by the judicial system, she points out that we can demand better service for victims before they become murderers: “We need to do a little more of the up-front work, we need to demand that of our police, our district attorney’s offices and certainly parole, probation --- anybody that has contact and works with battered women.”

Buel’s call is buttressed by the fact that we have seen four specific women, heard four compelling narratives, which give the victims a face, and
heard a recital of serial death statistics, which give the issue material significance. Her commentary presents a framing narrative. She speaks with the voice of a former victim, and thus she proves the *remediability* of the issue. More than that, she is a person in a position of social responsibility: she is an “Assistant District Attorney, Suffolk County Domestic Violence Unit,” thus she speaks credibly of facts and statistics. Further, her personal narrative, as we shall see, amplifies the call to moral action.

*The Imperative for Moral Action*

The attempt to portray the issue as a moral responsibility of concern to the public, is present in the individual women’s stories, in Buel’s own story, and in the attempt to make the public responsible for the damage to women:

...we’ve come a little ways in 15 years. There are now 1200 battered women’s shelters across this country. But you need to keep that in perspective: there are about 3800 animal protection shelters. No matter how much you love animals it seems to me our priorities are a little skewed when we have three times the number of shelters for homeless animals then we have for battered women and their children

While acknowledging the statistics that say one out of every two women will be involved in violent relationships, Buel asserts that the reason is “Not because 50% of all men are batterers, but because we as their community and society, completely fail to hold them accountable. They are free to move on to the next victim.”

She later adds:

Do you know how many battered women tell me about assaults in front of their building, out in public, or in apartments with thin walls, or in summer with the windows and doors open? And nobody can be bothered to call the police...
Most tellingly, her final message in the film is a direct call to citizen involvement and responsibility:

If you have not been victimized, if you have not been stalked, if you haven’t been stabbed, beaten, chased across state lines, tracked down, kidnapped, taken back, beaten again, feared for your life, you have truly been blessed. And this is an opportunity to thank God that you have been spared that. But I would argue it means you have a greater responsibility to try to empathize and understand with those of us who live with that, who don’t know what it is to sleep through an entire night because you jump at every noise, yes, fifteen years later.

Buel continually refers to “we” as she presents the reality of domestic violence. She is the voice of accountability and accusation. Her own story is of terror and alienation:

When I talk about fear, one of the stories that I will share with you that I hope I will never forget is having left New York, gone to a small rural town in New Hampshire where I thought I would be safe. I was in a Laundromat on a Saturday morning, my son was playing around, there were people over by the cash registers and my husband walked in the door. And I yelled over for the people to call the police. But he said “No this is my wife. We’ve just had a little fight. Nobody needs to do anything.” And I still had bruises on the side of my face. I said “no this is the person who beat me up. You need to call the police.” But he said “No this is my wife. We’ve just had a little fight. I’ve come to pick her up and take her home.” So nobody moved. And I thought as long as I live I want to remember what it feels like to be terrified for my life and nobody could even pick up the phone.

And yet Buel survived, and returns to tell the tale and call for political responsibility and moral accountability. Her *ethos* is present as she confidently recites statistics. She speaks clearly, firmly, slowly, never failing to make eye contact, to make connections with the audience. She speaks as an authority before a classroom of men and women who raptly listen. She is a teacher, instructing at Harvard Law School, no less. She possesses the experience, and has managed to move from victim to survivor. Her
credentials are unimpeachable, her ethos is strong. Buel can speak to, and for, all of Gusfield’s criteria: facticity (via statistics); remediability (via her own presence) and moral responsibility. The movie provides strong ownership claims, and Buel is the spokesperson.

**Other claims: Prisoners of War**

As ownership is asserted, other claims are made; the aforementioned “there is a war on women and children” and women are pure victims. There is evidence provided that women can’t escape, that indeed they are “prisoners of war.” All four victims, and Buel herself, attempted to leave their abuser. In each situation, the women were unable to successfully free themselves. At one point, Lisa even directly uses the prisoner of war descriptor:

I was arrested for first degree murder. And then I went to ATU, awaiting trial. It was a unit with this long hallway. There was 21 rooms. I was in room 201. They brought me there in the middle of the night. And I spent three and a half years up there, in that one hallway, in that one room. I was locked 22 hours a day, awaiting trial. I spent many hours crying, wondering what was going to happen to me, facing life in prison. And I don’t know how I did those three and a half years up there. I mean, it was a prisoner of war camp, so to speak, locked up in this 8 x 15 room.

**Indicting the Police**

Not only were the women real-life prisoners of the war on women and children alleged by the documentary, they are also victims of the system, as police fail to protect. Their narratives serve to place blame on, and demand accountability from, the police and the entire judicial system. It is a clear attempt to frame and own the issue.
Each woman reached out to the police, but was not protected. Their narratives provide empirical evidence of the failure of the system to protect, a telling indictment which places responsibility on the shoulders of the police.

Lisa tells of an instance where her batterer almost killed her: “I had called the police for them to come and they never came. It was one of those times because they just got real used to me calling they never bothered coming anymore.”

After being attacked while at work, and assisted by members of the public, Eugenia relates the following:

So the police came. I said “Arrest him! Arrest him! he just attacked me” I was in hysterics. The guy says “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. He says he’s your boyfriend” I said “My boyfriend? what that has to do with it? The man just attacked me.” I said “what does that have to do with it?” “Um well we didn’t see anything.” They didn’t see anything? They’re the police. There was witnesses who held him there, there was the bystanders. “No” they told me “you have to go down and get a restraining order” sometime this was like 4:30 in the afternoon, “tomorrow morning you have to go out and get a restraining order.” I said “restraining order? Arrest him. I’m an employee. You’re supposed to protect me. Arrest him.” “No” he said. “Listen to me: calm down. “ In the meantime Alfred is standing back jumping [sic] around, laughing--- it was a big joke to him.

Patty echoes the same sense of frustration as she describes the failed results of her attempt to have the police help her, and then describes the brutal personal consequences:

Right before I did leave him one time he had beat me so bad I had a broken nose, a fractured nose. I called the police. The police came, and he was standing in the doorway and I was in the driveway covered in blood and I said “I want him arrested” and they says “well we didn’t see him do it, we can’t arrest him. “ And I’m like “well what, do you think I did this to myself?” And he was laughing. After the police left I got a worse beating.
Shannon details the treatment she received from police when, bruised and bleeding, she was taken into custody:

And in the police station, nobody never asked me how I was: I was bruised very badly. Jose had beat me so badly that the muscles in my knees were moving. You could see the muscles flexing in my kneecap. My head was busted open.

Their individual and combined narratives make powerful presentations that call for accountability on the part of the police departments for their failure to act, their failure to obey their own oaths: to serve and protect. But the police are not the only component of the judicial system that failed these women.

**Indicting the Courts**

In the instances where the women were able to provide enough evidence to satisfy police that battery had occurred, the judicial system still failed to hold the abusers accountable.

Lisa shares what happened after Tommy broke in and beat her with a hammer:

When I tried to kick him out, at different points I'd tell him I had restraining orders. One time I had a restraining order against him and he was living with his mother but he would be at my house all the time for hours, trying to get in the door. ...And the police came. There was charges brought against him: assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, attempted murder, B&E in the daytime many charges which nothing happened with.

Thus not only did Lisa "do the right thing" and obtain a restraining order, even multiple charges failed to result in her abuser being held accountable for his actions.
Patty shares her experiences with the failure of the system: “They get, it makes them worse when the cops show up and they tell you we can’t help you. Then they get mad: Oh, you gonna call the police on me? Oh, OK fine, I’ll kill you now…”

Later:

Brian’s attitude was “well if I can’t have you and Timmy then you’re not gonna have Timmy. If I can’t have Timmy, no one’s gonna have Timmy.” Brian somehow got a court order, another judge to say that he could take Timmy to Florida...

This particular failure of the system was a direct precursor to her murder of her abuser. Her narrative impeaches the ability of the system to protect the most vulnerable members of society: mothers and children.

Eugenia reveals the court’s failure to allow her lawyer to present an adequate defense:

My attorney, um, he introduced the battered women’s syndrome. But they wouldn’t allow it into the courtroom. The judge heard it and asked him “What was this? Who says so? Where did you get this thing from, battered women’s syndrome?” So the jury was dismissed and we went through like two or three hours of expert testimony. When the jury came back the trial resumed without the expert testimony...

Not only do the police and courts fail to protect, they also circumvent the foundational principles of our judicial system: the defendant was denied the right to present an adequate defense. The women were victims of domestic violence, and they become victims of individuals and agencies that should protect them.

Perhaps Shannon puts it most poignantly: “I’m the victim, I’ve been victimized by Jose and now I’m being victimized by the system.”
And finally, Buel, again the voice of reason, tellingly indicts the system:

The very DA’s offices, who somehow do not have the time, money, resources, people to help battered women when we come in as the plaintiffs in these actions or as witnesses in criminal cases, somehow have all the prosecutors, all the police investigators, they can possibly need when we are the defendants. This is nothing short of misogyny. This is nothing short of a criminal justice system that is dealing very differently with women as defendants, and in particular battered women as defendants, than any other kind of defendant.

**But Why Don’t They Just Leave? Claims Of Rationality**

Good reasons were also provided, in narratives, for why women don’t leave their abuser. It is, again, not because they are insane, irrational, infatuated with violence, or desirous of punishment. Note that Buel is facing society-wide *systemic* blocks to leaving her abuser as she explains choices she made and her good reasons for making those choices:

At first when I left, I went back it was because he said he was sorry. It would never happen again. And then it was because I would leave, the first time after that I left I got a job in a shoe factory, but by the time you’ve paid your rent and daycare, there’s no money to eat. You probably can’t even pay your rent. So you go back because you decide that it’s more important to feed your children. That you will figure out magically how to stop that abuse.

Similarly, Patty shares her bewilderment and emotional pain as she attempts to make sense of the abuse. Like Buel, she uses a vernacular narrative format to express her good reasons for staying, in the form of universally understandable hopes and desires:

I didn’t know what was wrong. I didn’t know what I was doing wrong. Now I realize that, at that time you feel like it’s you, something you’re doing to provoke his behavior, so you try to do everything right um but nothing seems to work. It just doesn’t change the way they are...You end up staying because you really want to believe that the person you love loves you back. Every person, human being needs to believe that
they're loved and needed and because you hate what they're doing, it
doesn't mean you hate them. And you believe they'll change. When
they're crying and telling you that "I love you. I need you. I can't live
without you." I'm a human being, my heart goes out to that person, if
they're sin[cere]--I believe that they're really sorry. I'd cry with him.

Thus Buel and Patty both present rational and profoundly
understandable good reasons for returning to an abusive relationship. They
stake their claim to sanity, necessity, and compassion.

**When Hope, Effort, And The System Fail, There Is No Other Option:**

**Claims Of Desperation**

After believing themselves abandoned by the system and the police,
the women viewed themselves as having, in the most literal sense, no other
option. Patty tells viewers:

I knew my life was on the line here. So I went in the house and I
grabbed a, I went in the cabinet and I grabbed my father's gun because
I didn't know what else to do. I had called the police, I had done
everything in my power to leave this man and to get the police to help
me and they wouldn't. So I had to protect myself. It was me or him. I
guess I didn't know if I even wanted to live up until that moment.
Whether I should kill myself ---I didn't know.

Shannon came to the realization "But I had to defend my life. It was
either me or him, and that night I felt it was going to be me. You know I um
I've been tortured all my life but being with Jose was the worst, and I just
couldn't take any more."

Eugenia asserts succinctly: "I didn't murder no one...he came to
murder me, it just so happened I put the final blow to him instead of him
putting the final blow to me...."
In everyday language, in vernacular discourse, in narratives that provide good reasons, these individual and no longer faceless women tell of making horrible and virtually inescapable choices. They assert claims, and provide empirical evidence, that they rationally had no other choice but to defend their lives.

*The Women’s Final Claims*

Finally, the women share what they want society to know:

I just hope that no other woman has to defend her life like I had to. If anybody learns anything from me telling my story I hope it’s that: that you do have rights, and demand them, because they HAVE to protect you. The police should have protected me, the courts should have protected me and they didn’t, and here I sit and it shouldn’t have to happen... If a stranger had been doing this to me, they would have helped me. But because it was my husband and my ex-husband they won’t help me and I don’t understand it. I don’t understand....[Patty]

The whole situation with this, it didn’t have to be. There didn’t have to be a death, and there didn’t have to be ME in prison. And my son didn’t have to lose his mother for how many years, and he doesn’t know me anymore... It didn’t have to be this way. [Lisa]

Their narratives and reasoning assert that “It didn’t have to be this way.” We are led to the inescapable conclusion that the women did not fail to take action, *we* as a society failed *them*. Had we accepted the moral responsibility to protect these victims, they would not have been further victimized, their abusers would not be dead, families not disrupted, women not made into prisoners of a war they did not begin.

The last spoken words in the film are those of Meekah Scott. As she finishes her recitation of names of victims, she concludes: “Twenty women in 11 months. It's crazy. I could have been one of these statistics...but I fought
back.” The accompanying text tells us that “Meekah Scott was sentenced to 8 – 12 years for killing her batterer. She is currently out on appeal.”

Absence Noted

While the women make poignant and persuasive claims for ownership of the issue, there are parties whose absence, Gusfield would counsel, is important to note. While both Buel and Booker are speaking before a law-school audience, there is no official representation on the part of the police, the criminal justice system, the courts, or legislators. In fact, there are no men’s voices at all, and the only visual evidence we see is of alleged perpetrators being led away by male police officers.

Similarly, there is no sense of voice or presence of religious or spiritual community members. While Patty, Shannon, and Lisa mention living with, running to, or calling mothers and (in Shannon’s case) a grandmother, there is no strong sense of a supportive family for these women. No neighbors, no allies, no community. Strangers, bystanders, and acquaintances sometimes intervene, and many incidents take place in public, but there is no sense of community or neighborhood support for the women.

Shannon mentions being hospitalized, Lisa mentions having teeth knocked out, Buel cites statistics from the Center for Disease Control, but no medical workers are present as supportive of battered women. No one apparently reported the instances of abuse, thus the medical establishment is silent. There are no social workers, there are no counselors, there are no advocates in the welfare or mental health system.
Men, the courts, the legal system, the police, the religious community and the professional medical establishment are all absent or silent. While their absence can surely be traced to choices made by the director of the documentary, that choice itself is telling. It presents an argument. It is a rhetorical construction that further sheds blame on those (patriarchal and largely male) institutions. Those institutions are silent. They make no defense. The present no claims. The experts are the women, the victims, themselves, and empowering advocates like Buel and, to an extent, Booker. Who speaks for the women? Who claims ownership of the issue and assigns responsibility for remediation? The women themselves, and grassroots advocates.

Thus the movie, *Defending Our Lives*, can clearly be seen as a public attempt to control the issue of domestic violence. Most specifically, it attempts to move perceptions from the “victim as mentally ill” to the women as “pure victims.” Along the way, claims are made that indict the legal system, the police, and those members of the public who stand by and allow abuse to happen. Good reasons are provided, through narratives, to support those claims and, moreover, to answer the unstated question “Why didn’t she just leave?”

Finally, the silence of others who might reasonably be expected to have a stake in the resolution of the issue, namely the church, the medical/therapeutic community, and the courts, makes even more persuasive the voices of the victims, and allows their presentation as sane but
suffering, alone but not “other” and, ultimately, as human beings who present the audience with clear and compelling moral imperatives to act.
CHAPTER FIVE
MAKING IT PERSONAL

Between the Movie and the Book: Historical Context

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was introduced in 1990 and ratified in 1994, reauthorized in 1998, and again in 2000. The public had apparently been convinced that there was facticity and remediability in the issue of domestic violence, and tales such as those presented in Defending Our Lives also argued persuasively for moral accountability and moral responsibility. The federal government, through the VAWA, was providing grants to combat domestic violence. There were more and more localities funding studies, supporting increased awareness, and taking stands to prosecute domestic violence. According to Gusfield's (1981) criteria, the public dollars and governmental actions directed towards combating domestic violence indicate it could be seen as an established public problem. The question of ownership, however, was still contested, as was the concept, or "face" if you will, of the "pure victim."

In their attempt to present that "pure victim," those from the grassroots perspective who advocated on behalf of victims had, to an extent, presented a rhetorical construction that needed fine-tuning. Remember that this construction featured four characteristics:

First, abused women are not themselves violent, unless driven to violence in self-defense. Second, battered women are characterized as
having experienced extreme physical violence separated by periods of emotional abuse. Third, the abuse is presented as a pattern of events that necessarily increase in severity and frequency, and that will only get worse unless someone intervenes. Finally, battered women are described as terrified by this experience. (Davies, 1998, p.15)

While many women did, indeed, meet the criteria of “pure victim” there were two main disadvantages in that rhetorical construction. First, many victims of abuse are not “pure victims”: they are not violent toward their partner; they did and do not experience “extreme physical violence” (which is the end spectrum of a continuum of abusive behaviors); and not all victims would necessarily deem themselves “terrified.” In essence, the “pure” victim did not fit the reality of abuse as experienced by many women and those who advocate for the abused. While the model certainly rings true for those who experience debilitating violence, it hampered the activists, who wanted to expand the definition of domestic violence to the following:

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive control in an intimate relationship which may be characterized by physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or financial abuse or isolating and controlling behaviors on the part of the perpetrator (Susan Schecter, cited in the Safehouse Speakers Bureau training packet, 2002).

Thus, the “pure victim” constrained the definition of domestic violence, limiting it to severe physical battery. Further, it did not allow for expanding the concept of “abuse” to include emotional, verbal, sexual or financial mistreatment, all of which advocates maintain are real, consequential, dangerous, and worthy of public censure and remediation.

Secondly, because the “pure victim” is such an extreme presentation (in Defending Our Lives the majority of the stories were from women
imprisoned for murder, while grim obituary-like statistics enhanced the picture presented) it enabled the public to maintain a safe distance from involvement in the issue. There still remained a distance between “those women” or “those people” involved in domestic battery, and the perception, necessary for battered women’s supporters, that victims of domestic abuse were/are not “other” but rather, potentially, “everywoman.” The women remain distanced and, while perhaps pitiable, clearly “not me.” In this respect, the notion of “pure victim”, so necessary in wrestling issue control away from the clinical professionals, and asserting ownership for the grassroots advocates, actually worked against making victims capable of personal identification.

The Rhetorical Challenge

Thus the issue for rhetors and would-be owners of the problem is to present the face of domestic violence, the reality of the victim/survivor, in such a way that a public will be formed, one that will engage in discourse and attempt to mediate the problem by authorizing action. The rhetor’s problem is that the shoe – narrative, in this case --- no longer fits: The pure victim is not adequate to represent the multifaceted nature of the problem nor does it reflect the “reality” of abused women nor that of the general public. The obstacle to be overcome is that the victim must be someone with whom potential members of the public can identify. The victim/survivor must be personalized. S/he must be made real, complex, identifiable, non-stereotypical. In short, she must be made “normal.”
In addition, there is a very significant constraint that remains: while battery is a crime, to much of the public violence between intimate partners remains a matter of “other people’s business.” To overcome this obstacle, the personalized victim must also represent a call to conscience; she must speak to citizens and must, by virtue of identifying the victim/survivor as potentially being a friend, family member or neighbor, command an acceptance of personal moral responsibility on the part of a newly formed public. Unless people accept that identification and responsibility, they will not be motivated to act as a public, to engage in the discourse that can create change and remediation. This chapter will look at one attempt to make personal, to “normalize,” the face of the abused.

The Text

When this research project was first conceived there were overarching considerations. The research question concerned presentations made in public, for public consumption, and available to the public, about the issue of domestic violence. Care had also to be given to the presence of narratives. A final concern was the presence --- or absence --- of the women’s voices. The movie *Defending Our Lives* met those criteria.

There are many books available to the general public on the issue of domestic violence (a June 2003, search for “domestic violence” on Amazon.com resulted in 422 titles). They tend to fall into categories, however, that do not adequately meet the needs of this study: self help; theoretical texts; fiction (including romance!); sociological studies and reports. Although
many of these do incorporate the voices of victims, they are quite often secondary in importance to a theoretical perspective or argument.

That is not the case with *A Woman like You* (Anderson, 1997). The text is comprised of pictures of women and their first-person narratives. One cannot help but notice that this is not a factual report. Its rhetorical design is explicitly to engage the reader by answering the question “what does a victim look like?” This book is, moreover, narrative-focused and available to the general public through local bookstores and the ubiquitous Amazon.com, where it is ranked at 145,486 (June, 03). Because of its narrative focus, availability, and strong presentation of victim’s voices, this text meets the main criteria of the research project.

Anderson’s book presents the audience with narrative, vernacular discourse, not syllogistic logic or Habermasian rationality. It is an appeal to a particular public; one concerned with answering questions about the victims/survivors of domestic violence. Who is she? What makes her different from me? How did this happen? It is clearly an attempt on the part of the author to give a very personalized face to the victims and survivors of domestic abuse, in all its many facets.

*Of Good Reasons and The Natural Procedure of Argument*

Hauser (2000) has argued for the validity of good reasons as persuasive tools in vernacular public spheres. An analysis of these narratives will be an attempt to ascertain what “good reasons” are presented for the actions, or inactions, of the women in the book. This is particularly important,
as in traditional argumentation terms, the burden of proof is upon the women. They have been judged “victim” “outsider” and “other.” They must prove that they are not (still) victims, and deviant from recognizable norms. They must present compelling reasons to accept their inclusion in the world of the public. Their narratives, and the good reasons contained therein, can be seen as a subtle attempt to answer anticipated questions, including the most frequently asked: why? Why didn’t you leave?

There is, however, another perspective that is of importance: identification. Remember that the challenge for advocates, survivors, and spokespersons is to move the perception of the victim from “pure” and therefore “other” to “person-able” especially in the sense of being a recognizable person, someone “like me” or “like you” or “like Sarah, or cousin Sue, or Bill’s wife.” Moreover, that person must be “normal.” The “pure victim” is an attempt to present the woman as not mentally incompetent or evil. That demand remains: the woman/victim/survivor must not be viewed as freakish, or deviant or mentally unstable. In short, she cannot be seen as somehow “deserving” of abuse. Members called to participate in vernacular discourse about the issue of domestic violence, those who will form a public, must be able to identify with the reality and person-hood of the victim/survivor.

While there is certainly precedent for using Burkean audience arousal and satisfaction as a framework for analyzing the narratives, one other theoretical perspective presents intriguing opportunities for examining the process of identification. Gladys Murphy Graham (1925) re-presents Bernard
Bosanquet’s “Natural Procedure in Argument.” The procedure she describes is linear: it is a presentation of reality such that the “inevitable progress” of the reader/interlocutor is an acceptance of a “situation.” The situation is compellingly presented, layer upon layer, so that it becomes familiar. Once familiar, it fits within a person’s worldview, such that they are compelled to a conclusion, or else must change their understanding of reality.

It must be noted that while the situation is specific, the worldview is antecedent. Thus, in a culture where women are viewed as expendable, as chattel, and the man given liberal permission to inflict corporal punishment at will and to the degree he desires (up to and including death) the narrative of situation described by Anderson would not present compelling reasons for identification. In a society such as ours, governed by laws and an acceptance that battery is not acceptable, and violence to children to be condemned, the worldview is compatible with the situation described.

Once the situation has been made familiar and accepted, an identification of sorts has taken place and there is no other logical, rational, or moral outcome than that presented/advocated by the rhetor. According to Graham:

Its plan is simply to portray a situation which gradually, of itself, without compulsion or contention on the part of the speaker, through the compelling power of a developing situation makes evident to the mind of the hearer the necessity of one certain solution. (p. 321)

This natural procedure has all the hallmarks of a vernacular, narrative argument in that it is a rhetorically constructed, emplotted and descriptive unfolding which leads to an inescapable, morally imperative conclusion:
The method is not in the orthodox and generally accepted sense argumentative; rather it is that of exposition with a goodly dash of narration and description. Technically it does not argue; it merely sets forth --- yet slowly, definitely as it proceeds, the lines of descriptive development begin to converge and it becomes compellingly evident to each thinking mind that such a set of conditions implies, necessitates, one thing, the conclusion toward which an approach has been from the beginning, being made. It is argument in a very true sense, its aim is to convince and persuade, yet it is argument of which exposition, narration and description are handmaidens. (p. 321)

Graham uses the example of one speaker's "argument," narratively and compellingly presented to an audience:

It was not emotionally done; it was simply fact piled upon fact, picture put up beside picture, until the very pressure of it demanded the conclusion. The situation being what it was, one thing must come. The speaker's conclusion, which at the beginning would have been foreign to the audience, hostilely received, was at the close but the result of its own thinking. It fairly rushed ahead of him to it. Because it had accepted the non-contentious background situation, it must accept the conclusion which that situation implied (p. 322, italics Graham's).

And later, Graham points out that, once having seen, having accepted a given situation, there was a natural conclusion: "...having accepted the situation, the mind could not consistently refuse the move implied" (p. 322). Thus, having accepted the scene, situation, or narrative set forward by the rhetor it would be logically impossible to reject the consequent action called for. In this case, if a suitably compelling situation is set forth by Anderson, then the attendant action --- recognizing that domestic violence could happen to Everywoman, that she is sane, normal and not "other" --- would be logically and morally impossible to ignore.

Anderson's task, then, is to simply and compellingly present fact upon fact, narrative after narrative, picture put up beside picture, leading the reader
to one inescapable conclusion: the faces and stories represent real persons, normal women, women, in short, like "us." If they are normal, real, recognizable and their actions consistent with understandable good reasons (Fisher's *narrative coherence* and *fidelity*) then the reader cannot escape the call to his/her conscience to see that they are not "other" deviant, freakish, and deserving of cruelty or punishment. The reader’s moral register must resonate to the call for fundamental human rights: respect, protection, safety of person. Thus, if the reader accepts the collective and individual stories as representative of a morally coherent and acceptable worldview, if the reality of the victims’ narratives and faces are identifiable, recognizable, no longer "foreign" or "other" then acceptance of that worldview extends moral responsibility. The women are no longer "them" but rather they are "one of us — mother, sister, aunt, cousin, neighbor, friend, co-worker."

**Examination of the Text**

The examination of the text will begin with a brief look at the overarching narrative provided in the text, followed by a teasing out of common themes present across the different narratives. We will examine the questions the narratives seek to answer. Finally, we will examine how those combined reasons and narratives present a view of world and situation, and the consequences of accepting that view.
Introduction to the Text

The book *A Woman Like You* was published in 1997. The title clearly identifies a potential audience: women. The author and photographer, Vera Anderson, is herself a former battered woman. Hers is the first face, and the first story, in the book. The book consists of seventy pages of black-and-white photographs, and first-person stories that accompany each: the photograph of each victim/survivor is on the right page, and on the left, facing it, is the "subject's" story. Beneath each story is a caption, italicized and placed at the bottom of the page [see Appendix C]. The caption, in Anderson's voice, serves to summarize/benchmark the story. In some cases, the caption provides information not present in the narrative itself, material which adds to the richness of the combined story and photograph (e.g. There is no mention of cultural differences in Yoshi's story, but the caption at the bottom of the page reveals: "When she was growing up in Japan, girls were encouraged to marry young and be obedient wives" [p. 8])

The book serves as an illumination of the faces and stories of women. It is important, however, to note that there is no overt denunciation of men, no calls to end patriarchy, no strident political call to action. While the book may rightly be considered "pro-woman" it is not a text that is "anti-man."

There are, including the author, thirty-six stories. Some accounts are only a paragraph long; the longest one --- the last one --- is spread across four pages: two with text, and two of pictures.
Most of the faces are of women. One is a photograph of a blond toddler. The audience sees only his back, as he snuggles against the body of a woman on crutches. We cannot see the woman above the waist, as the focus is on the young child. We can see that the woman has a broken leg.

There is also a picture of two teenaged girls. They are sisters. They stand together in front of a Christmas tree.

The book represents the voices of thirty-seven different speakers, all but Anderson identified only by his/her first name.

The demographics of the storytellers reveal a varied lot. Twenty-five of the voices are from whites; seven are Black; three are Asian; one appears Hispanic. Daniel and his toddler brother are the youngest; Marion died in prison. There are women from every conceivable age bracket from teenaged sisters to sixty or seventy year old women. Their backgrounds indicate they are from diverse social strata: professionals, blue collar, from the projects, wealthy. One woman identifies herself as Jewish, another as Catholic. Most of the women were married to their abusers. Two have successfully remarried non-abusive males. Another divorced an abusive male and then married a "completely different" man who also proved abusive. Three women were in unmarried heterosexual relationships. Two are lesbian. Nine of the women were, or are, in prison for the murder of their abuser. A tenth, the mother of the two teenaged sisters, is a silent presence.

While the majority of the stories, and certainly the stories told by the imprisoned women, deal with physical battery, often up to and including
hospitalization, there are other stories which reflect emotional and financial
abuse: women who were constantly belittled; whose very sanity was
questioned; who were kept isolated and literally penniless, trapped within their
own homes.

The purpose of the book, according to Anderson, grew out of her own
experience. When friends found out that she had been involved in a violent
marriage, they said “You don’t look like a battered woman.” Her response:

I agreed. I didn’t think of myself as a battered woman. But then, what
did a “battered woman” look like? I started studying the faces where I
had been volunteering at a domestic violence shelter, looking for the
answer to that question. What I saw were the faces of my neighbors,
my mother, my sister, my daughter. I saw myself. The truth is, battered
women are all around us. We just don’t recognize them, because they
look like us. And so I began my journey with my camera to explore the
“face” of domestic violence (1997, p. 1)

The stories, and the captions, are text that pose and answer questions.
They allow the audience to hear the voices, see the faces, and enter, at least
partially, the world(s) of the battered women. Those women are young, old,
of varying degrees of physical attractiveness. There are half-smiles on some
of the faces: some smiles seem tentative. A few pose with pets. The next to
the last picture, of Brenda with her daughters, is the only picture where there
is a full-blown smile on any face.

Of Narratives and Visuals

The pictures are portraits of the faces of women, but they are as
different from the portraits of Diane Arbus (1972) as it is possible to imagine.
While both women are photographic artists, and both deal in black and white
portraits, Arbus attempts to use her lens to make an artistic statement which
startles the viewer with images of the unusual, the freakish, and discarded segments of society. There is a shock value to Arbus, as she portrays, in everyday situations, people and objects which would be judged as socially deviant: a giant---literally---adult male, standing in a living room, head tilted to avoid touching the ceiling, while his dwarf-sized parents gaze up at him.

Anderson uses her black and white photos to focus attention on the faces of the women. She, portrays, like Arbus, everyday situations, and people who might be judged as socially deviant, but Anderson's purpose is to soothe rather than shock, to attract rather than repel. With no color to distract, Anderson's women are both very recognizable and surreal at the same moment: There is a sense of serenity and timelessness to the portraits. Almost every woman gravely, perhaps even bravely, faces the lens of the camera.

Most photographs are centered on the faces of the women, "head and shoulders" shots, they show them from the waist upwards; few are full length poses. Some women have minor but visible scars. Some faces are partially shadowed, some are interior-shot, others are clearly taken outside. Some women wear suits, others sweater/skirt combinations, and a few wear what might be called a "housedress," or more informal t-shirt and jeans combinations.

Other than describing the women as profoundly normal-looking, it is, perhaps, easier to say what the pictures do not represent, than to make a generalized claim about what they do: they do not represent glamour; they do
not show pain; they are not unrecognizable or overly stylized; they are not limited in terms of race, age, class or ethnicity.

Were there no text, and merely pictures, one might conclude it was simply a photo-essay on the faces of some (somewhat serious) women in America. They are the faces of women from the neighborhood, from church and the dentist's office and the soccer field and the PTA. They are grandmothers and young women and professionals and teachers and choir directors. Absent their narratives, they are --- us. They are as different as the neighbors on the block, and as similar as members of our community.

When narratives are added, we see the great commonality: that each woman/storyteller has been touched by domestic violence and has, in some way, responded, changed, altered her life or the lives of her loved ones. Almost every women thought she was the “only” one to experience the violence. Almost every woman was afraid, and felt isolated. And every woman has very, very old eyes.

Thus narratives combined with photographs allow us to see more richly those things that separate and individualize each woman, as well as the common experiences and potentially common worldview that they share. Absent pictures, a strong component of the narrative package would be lost. The faces provide an added ethos to their words, they silently testify to the reality and authenticity of each. And while there remains some debate about whether pictures can *make* arguments, (Blair, 1996; Birdsell and Groarcke, 1996; Fleming, 1996) there seems to be little doubt that pictures (and art, and
sculpture, and buildings...) can present claims. These portraits make claims of normality, and difference, and recognizability. They are the ethos for their narrative.

**The World of A Woman Like You**

As aforementioned, the text presents a view of the world, a meta-narrative. Anderson slowly, deliberately, layers narrative upon narrative, picture upon picture, and the resulting overarching story is that any woman, every woman, can be touched by domestic violence and abuse. The fact that every story, as every face, is different, yet every one similar, makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to conclude that there is a "type" of woman who "deserves" or "asks for" abusive treatment.

There are no masochists in this world: no woman who entered into a relationship aware that her partner was an abuser, and stayed because she enjoyed the treatment. The women have survived. They escaped. But the world they reveal, the world of their abusive relationships, is a world of isolation, fear, confusion.

Common themes in the individual narratives, serve a dual purpose. First, they offer answers to universal, if unarticulated, questions: why did you become involved with your partner? What happened in the relationship? What happened to you? Why did you stay? What made you leave? How did you leave? Those answers can be seen as providing "good reasons" for actions and inactions of the storytellers. If we accept those reasons, we have been, in
some sense, persuaded as to the validity and credibility of the women’s experiences.

The second purpose the narrative/picture combination serves is to, as Graham suggests, present to the reader, unfold before us, a situation. A reality is revealed to the reader as s/he moves from story to picture to story to picture. If the readers accept the inexorably revealed, inescapable reality of the narrated world, s/he must then accept the logical and coherent good reasons of the women. Having done that, s/he cannot logically and morally deny the existence of that world. An audience, a potential public, is called to action because the rhetor’s goal has been accomplished: reader’s identify with the reality of the women, and accept that they are no longer “other” but “us.” And the audience cannot escape the moral imperatives to action extended by the text.

We will begin with an analysis and examples of common threads in the narratives. We will then notice how the narrative themes present answers to questions. And finally, we will compare the “world” of the survivors, to the world of romance and relationships in America today.

**Common Threads/Themes in the Stories**

**Meetings, courtship, and marriage.** Many of the women share how they met their mates, and the stories are quite pedestrian: ⁴ “I met him when I was 14 and we got together 10 years later” [16] “He was the successful professional, I was the artist, the loving wife” [15]. “I was financially

⁴ Note: each different page number represents a different story, a different speaker.
independent and owned my own home when I met Bob" [12]. “I was 16 when I met Tom, 18 when we got married. Six months later my first baby was born, and four months after that I was pregnant again” [50]. “We met in college, in my radical liberal days” [46]. “…this was my first real relationship. I was young, I thought I was in love” [26]. “I met him at a church garage sale” [52]. Diverse stories, yet each linked by the very common, everyday nature of the tales.

One common thread: the men were charming: “…when I met this knight in shining armor, I was completely swept away…He was charming, romantic, incredibly passionate, and he was madly in love with me, all these things I had never experienced from a man” [58]. “I loved him, he was my mentor, he was my best friend….” [16]. “I knew him, Mr. Wonderful, for three years before I even dated him, and then I lived with him for eight months…He was a Southern gentleman and he had all the right things to say” [66]. “He was a ‘nice Jewish boy’ and as a single mother, having someone so eager to be a real dad for my son was attractive” [38]. If the women were guilty of anything, it was the common desire to meet a wonderful man and live happily ever after.

*Love is blind.* When there were signs that there were problems in the relationship, women often didn’t see, or interpret, them correctly: “Looking back, there were signs from the beginning….” [58]. “He was the only man I’d ever slept with, so I didn’t know how it was supposed to be” [46] and, from another “I know now that there were signs from the beginning, but I certainly
didn’t have the knowledge to identify them” [48]. Commonly, women misinterpreted actions: “I didn’t see the warning signs in his possessive behavior; I thought it was cute, I thought it meant he loved me” [68]. Or, in the words of another: “When he started telling me what to do and what to think, I didn’t see it as a control issue, I just thought it was his way of telling me to take care of myself” [16].

Many times the women were unsure that they had valid reasons to complain. At times, it was because the women came from an abusive background, although only one of the 35 narratives reported “That’s all I ever saw growing up, battering and abuse. So that’s what you think a relationship or family is” [36].

**The end of the honeymoon.** Much of the abuse happened once the courtship had ended and the marriage had begun: “The abuse started almost immediately after we were married” [42]. “After we were married, out relationship went from ‘You’re amazing, Jane’ to ‘You’re worthless’” [16]. “It was like we got married and now he had me and could do what he wanted to me” [42]. “When he hit me on our wedding day, he cradled me in his arms and begged my forgiveness” [68].

For a few, the abuse began with anger: “But as his anger turned to violence, I became confused. And then eventually it was me he was throwing around” [28].

“**Not in my world.**” Often, the women report being shocked, as though domestic violence was foreign to their world: “I knew there were
women that were beaten, but I thought it was a rare occurrence and only happened to so called low-class people. I certainly never thought it happened to women like me” [12]. “The first time I guess I was in shock, I didn't believe it had happened” [42] “After the first time he hurt me, he promised me it wouldn't happen again, and he agreed to get counseling” [52]. “…after that there was little incident after little incident” [26]. “I was afraid of anybody finding out, and still not really believing it was happening to me and always thinking it wasn’t going to happen any more” [42]. “I thought this just didn’t happen to people in my class” [58].

In many cases, the violence and abusive behavior increased so slowly that the women weren’t even aware of it: “It progressed so slowly, I just became accustomed to the ridicule, the condemnation, the constant mistreatment and verbal assaults” [60].

One reason a majority of the women reported staying was because they believed things would change: “for a long time I thought things would change, and of course they never did” [46].

Many of the women reiterate the now-common notion of spiraling and increasing violence: “the first time it got out of control, he started crying and said ‘I am so sorry, it’ll never happen again’ and that was the start of it, it never did finish after that” [32]. “…but during my pregnancy his anger began to accelerate”[28]

**Excuses and conditioning.** Very often the abuser provides excuses that women are only too eager to accept: “She would say, ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t
mean to do it. You bring out the worst in me; that’s why I do the things I do. Obviously I must love you, I care enough about you to get that angry’”[26]. “He kept making excuses for his behavior, and I kept listening”[28]. “…but when the man you love puts his head in your lap and cries and tells you how sorry he is, that he didn’t mean to do it, you want to believe it will change” [30]. “I didn’t like some of the things he said, and how he said them to me. But I made excuses for him” [14].

“People always ask ‘Why didn’t you leave?’ Some women have just been conditioned”[36].

“I had been a missionary…so it’s my natural instinct to reach out, and his stories about childhood family rejection and reform school made me feel compassionate” [52]. “I grew up in a sheltered, upper middle class environment and married a boy I grew up with…I always knew there was a passion missing” [58]. “…searching for understanding of this insanity, I see clearly that I had always glossed over his abusiveness towards me to salvage the love”[60]. “I saw him as a scared little boy and it touched this motherly thing in me, that’s what kept me in the relationship for so long”[62]. “But it happened because I feared for my life and I believed I had no other choice” [68].

**Reaching out: family, friends and religious:** Once actual physical abuse occurred, many of the women reached out to friends and family: “When I told my mother what was happening, she didn’t want to hear about the abuse, because he was supporting her, too” [18]. “Everyone kept telling me
how lucky I was to have a man like him, he was so good to us” [20]. “My partner at work was the only one who knew, but after the first episode she said to me ‘He only hit you once, and look at how much he has going for him, he’s a great catch…”[14]. Her relationship with an abuser “sounded good to me because it sounded good to my family…it was important to make my life acceptable to them” [38]. “I went to my parents…but they felt uncomfortable talking about something so unpleasant” [38]. “My family said I should just try and make my marriage work” [50]. When one woman was beaten on the evening of her wedding, “His mother said ‘It’s just the stress of the wedding” [68].

Religious factors seemed to complicate attempts to receive advice, support and help: “…but I’m very traditional, and in my religion sleeping with a man was making a commitment to spend your life together, and I took that seriously” [46]. “I got married at 16, and when my husband blacked my eye three days after the wedding, my minister told me I needed to learn to be a better wife and not talk back” [48]. It was not that women did not reach out, but that they perceived avenues of support to be nonexistent or limited.

Women and “the system.” The police were not always allies for the women: “the police were always at my door” [54]. “…and every time I called the police, they would come to the house, and they would recognize my husband from the papers, or they had gone to high school with him. So they wouldn’t arrest him” [10]. “The last time he was arrested he pleaded guilty to 15 counts” [54].
The women express justified fear of the criminal justice system: “My entire life had changed because of what he had done to me. But my husband only went to jail for four hours” [48]. "I was very guarded, afraid that if I said what had happened to my son, by allowing it would be considered a crime” [38]. For some women, that fear was justified: “[I]...was in the room with my two year old daughter – and he threw a photograph of us on the floor, took out his gun, and shot it...by not having reported it myself...I committed felony child endangerment. So my job was threatened, I had to take a two day suspension without pay, I got punished for what he did” [50].

One third of the women had spent, or were spending, time in jail for the murder of their abuser(s). Sentences the women served were severe: “I got life without the possibility of parole. The judge told me that 24 hours after I’m dead, I could be released” [44]. “And then the state comes in, and they make you ashamed for saving your own life. How is it a crime to save your own life?” [22]. “...And then they threw my life away in court”[24].

Sometimes drugs and/or alcohol were factors: “My partner was much younger and she sometimes drank and took drugs, and at those times she would get crazy and that’s when she would jump on me” [64].

**Trying harder.** Isolation, confusion, and fear contribute to women doubting themselves. But many reported that, rather than leave, they would try harder to make the marriage work: “In the beginning, I just kept trying to make it better...” [16]. “I didn’t understand and I tried harder to make the
marriage work” [28]. “So I tried to be a better wife and stayed with him for 12 years” [48].

Social and cultural factors also contributed to the women feeling silenced: “I got out 20 years ago, and in those days no one talked about things like abuse. I didn’t tell one person in my life what was going on” [34]. “We didn’t have a name for it, we always knew it wasn’t right, but you didn’t talk about it then” [36]. “I never told anybody. In my culture, you keep these things to yourself” [20]. “No one knew” [1]. “…I didn’t know what was going on, I didn’t have anyone in this country.” [8]

**On being alone.** Part of the isolation was caused by the abusers: “I didn’t have friends, I couldn’t have friends, I couldn’t go out” [54]. “I just stayed at home, my whole life revolved around him walking through the front door” [16]. “the thing is, you’re so cut off from the real world” [22]. “I felt so isolated and confused, and every time he raised a hand to my kid, I became dead inside, much deader than when the abuse was directed at me”[38]. “I thought I was the only one, the only one in the world this happened to” [42]. “I can still close my eyes and remember that feeling, the fear, the isolation”[44]. “I had no one to tell me it wasn’t right, that it didn’t have to be that way” [48]. “you get scared, and so you don’t talk about it. The more I emotionally separated from him, the more he’d close in on me. I felt I had no support anywhere, and I felt completely alone” [50].

**On fear.** Often accompanying the isolation was fear and terror: “I needed help, but I was so scared to tell anyone” [8]. “I knew it wasn’t right, but
I was afraid to say anything to anybody, because he was so well liked in the community” [20]. “I lived with terror for so long that when my apartment caved in around me during the earthquake, I wasn’t that scared” [46]. “I was so afraid to express myself for so long” [42]. “but even after so many years, I still have lingering fears left over from those days when I was a battered woman” [44]. “I didn’t even call my mom, I was afraid if they knew anything it would somehow endanger them” [58]. “And I had never had any reason or experience to cause me to really fear anyone, before that exact moment when Ron threatened my life and I knew he meant it” [60].

**On children, and violence.** Very often the abuse extends to the children: “He started getting abusive with the kids...They had seen too much violence, it breaks my heart”[54]. “…when I told Tom I wanted a divorce, he locked himself in the bathroom and said he was going to shoot himself...he’d call me at work and tell me he didn’t want to live anymore, and he’d be at home with our kids, and I would panic that they were in danger”[50].

From the story provided by a nine year old boy: “It was July 1st when my dad broke my mom’s leg. While I was on the phone to 911 my grandfather, he’s about 87 I think, he hobbled over and tried to stop my dad but my dad punched him in the face. I tried to stop him again and then he punched me about 5 or 6 times” [56].

Sometimes, obviously, the battery is severe: “My husband had beaten me for 10 years and once burned my face with an electrical hair-straightening comb”[44]. “I didn’t hear any sounds again for 2 1/2 years” [48]. “I had these
big bruises on my face, and I had to go to the hospital later because I kept getting dizzy spells and bloody noses."[56]. "...two and a half years later, my face literally collapsed on day at work"[66].

**Planning to leave.** The women did try to leave, to end the relationships, some many times: "he started being verbally abusive to the point where I got scared and broke off the engagement, but then he started calling me"[66]. "I moved out a couple of times. But he would make these promises, and I really wanted to keep our family together"[4]. "...I tried to break it off many times. But he would always try to control me. He would push me, grab me, lock me out, he would spit on me..."[62]. "I left with my three daughters several times, but he'd always track us down"[68]. "I thought leaving him would end the problem, and so I had a girlfriend help me secretly move all of my things out of our storage unit...but it wasn't over, it was only the beginning. He just wouldn't let go"[46]. "even after he remarried he wouldn't leave me alone"[1].

**The great escapes.** Some women made elaborate preparations to escape: "I waited for him to fall asleep, and at two o'clock in the morning, in sweatpants and a nightgown, I tiptoed out of our condo with a quarter in my hand, walked three blocks down the street to a pay phone and called the police..."[4]. For some, the children provided the reason to finally leave: "So that day, we weren't fighting, I wasn't mad, I just looked at their faces and knew it had to come to an end. I got up and told him to leave. And he did, that was the last time he lived here"[54]. For another, it was the voice of a
beloved grandmother, urging her to leave; “I kept hearing my grandmother’s words, and the next morning I quietly told my daughter to go get in the car. I took almost nothing, and I just started driving north...I ended up about four hours away, at a friend of my father’s who was a lawyer. I filed my divorce from there” [58].

For yet another woman, the escape was literally a life-saving rescue: “He took me to the emergency room and then stood by me so I couldn’t tell the nurse what really happened...and while he was gone I told her ‘He did this to me...’ And she called the police” [62].

**It doesn’t end.** Even leaving did not stop the abuse: “It wasn’t over, but it was the first step. He still called, he threatened, he broke in” [4]. “and he kept harassing me until I moved out of the area and he no longer knew where to find me”[48]. “He stalked me for years after he left, I’m talking major stalking. He would get on the roof of my house, cut my electricity off, cut my phone lines. He put gasoline on my front lawn. He superglued all my doors locked” [54]. “…for the next two years after I left him, he terrorized us, he stalked me, he broke in, he tried to poison the dog, the police were always being called” [32].

**Scars remain.** One common theme is that the impact of domestic violence is long lasting, whether the battery is physically devastating, or not: “I was so emotionally paralyzed that I couldn’t open my mail” [1]. “…my whole adult life has been a chain reaction to that relationship, that fear. It takes away your ability to trust, it takes away your innocence”[2]. “But more than
your bones, it's your innocence, your trust, your spirit that gets broken. There isn't any surgery to fix that"[66]. "And now the death of my husband is one more horror I have to live with the rest of my life" [68].

**Emotional consequences.** Women's ability to feel emotions is sometimes warped and stunted: "The prisoner I interviewed had been battered for 31 years. She couldn't even look us in the eye, she was so embarrassed, and still blaming herself for being abused" [34]. "I was really ashamed of what was going on"[42]. "I recall vividly the searing pain of rejection, of feeling inferior, unwanted and incredibly isolated, constantly stifling my emotions to avoid conflict, fearing the loss of his love" [60]. "when I first went to the lawyer, I was so ashamed, I could only whisper it, 'He's been hurting me'"[28]

**Lack of understanding.** Lack of understanding is another theme. Sometimes the lack is on the part of the victim, sometimes in society: “Why didn't I know about it until it happened to me?” [12]. “It kept getting worse, but I just didn't know how to get out” [4]. “I couldn't understand the nightmare it became” [30]. “looking back…I feel sick. I can't explain how it could have gone on for years” [38]. “I don't know how it happened…”[42]. “At least with the earthquake I could understand what was happening and why. With my boyfriend none of it ever made any sense” [46]. “By the final year of our marriage, my life had deteriorated into a nightmare of fear, pain and despair, and I didn't know how to help myself” [68].

It's difficult for someone on the outside to understand the isolation, hopelessness a battered woman feels. Sometimes looking back, it's
difficult for me to understand it myself because I'm in such a different state of mind today. Even when I went to trial, I didn't know I was a battered woman. [70]

"But the court said my brother has to see my dad. I don't understand, if it's not safe for me, how can it be safe for a little baby?"[56].

"I hadn't reported it because I was so afraid of what he'd do, but no one seemed to understand" [50]. "People who haven't experienced it themselves just don't understand what it does to you" [44]. "You can't reason with somebody about this when they say 'well, you can just leave...’"[22]. "But people think you can just leave and it's over, and it doesn't work like that"[32].

"There doesn't seem to be any easy answer" [32].

"I'm angry at myself that I didn't wake up sooner. Why didn't I leave and stay gone? Why did I keep coming back? I know the answers, but it still doesn't make sense to me" [4].

Marriage, normalcy, and hopes. Women attempted to give reasons for staying: frequently cited reasons were because they were married and they respected their vows [1], "If you get married, then it's for life, and you have to take whatever is dished out to you" [20].

Yet another woman stayed because she wanted normalcy: "And you know you have to go logically, but you know that when it's good he makes you feel beautiful and you love him. So you stay, you just want things to be normal'"[2, italics hers].

Women stayed because they had hopes: "And I believed, once he'd stop drinking, he'd stop abusing me and we'd have a great life together..."[4].
And because they were enculturated: “As an educated African-American woman you’re socialized to support your man...And so I went into my nurturing mode” [14].

Many stayed because of fear: “And he told me ‘If you try to go out that window I will kill you and I will kill your child.’ I stayed because I believed him” [18]. “I didn’t end it because I thought he would hurt me. I didn’t file a police report because I believed it would humiliate him in the department or cause him to lose his position, and that would put me at greater risk”[14].

One woman even poignantly reflects that victims don’t want to acknowledge the problem:

I didn’t verbalize what was happening to me because that would make it real. The transformation you go through is so subtle, and it’s so progressive. I’m sure every girl when they’re a teenager says ‘no man will ever hit me!’ And then, when it happens to you, you want to rationalize it and justify it, because you don’t want it to be so. What are you going to do if you’ve made a commitment to this man, this relationship, this life, and it isn’t what you thought it would be?...the thing is, you’re so cut off from the real world. I guess I had never honestly thought of myself as a battered woman. I thought of myself as not having the best marriage [22].

“I tried hard to maintain my home so that my own children could have the stability I didn’t have, growing up in foster homes” [24].

**Answering the question, “Why?”** Perhaps the most common and significant question is “Why?”; why did you stay, why did you go back, why did you accept that treatment, why did you not leave? Almost every woman attempted, in some way, to answer that question. For many, emotional abuse, lack of self esteem, and a tendency to blame themselves were key. Thirteen of the victims directly reflect this type of abuse. “I didn’t see my self
esteem being whittled away" [1]. "He tells you how stupid you are and then when you confide in a friend they tell you how stupid you are for staying...and every time you go back to him you hate yourself a little more. And then he hurts you again, and it starts tearing you apart bit by bit" [2]. "My brain would get numb, I would think 'He's right, something's wrong with me'"[8]. “…so when he’d slap me, I thought I was getting my comeuppance" [18].

In the beginning, I just kept trying to make it better. And then towards the end it was like waiting for a pat on the head. He had me reduced to a child, I was so brainwashed. I think it was the repetitiveness of hearing how stupid and useless I was, that I was never good enough. What I thought didn’t matter, what I wanted wasn’t important, I was never right, I was always wrong…He kept saying this to me over and over and over. To the point where, towards the end, I really believed there was something wrong with me, that he must be right, I couldn’t function in the outside world without him...It was as though I had lost my personhood. [16]

“For a long time I believed that, I thought it must be me” [26].

“And there’s a prototype of a victim, and I could see that I was sort of that type, very nurturing and traditional, always willing to take blame myself rather than blame someone else” [34].

“After we were married, I kept making excuses for his anger and thinking it was me. Because if it was me, then I had some control over it and I could change it” [58].

After awhile, you see yourself through your batterer’s eyes and its not a pretty thing to look at. He made me believe it was my fault, that there was something wrong with me, that I couldn’t give enough or be enough to make my marriage work [42].
"He wasn't from the projects, like I was, and I saw him as this good person who was better than me...but I had no self-esteem, when somebody is constantly telling you that you're ugly, that you're nothing..."[54].

"...there was so much shame and guilt and of course you have no self-esteem anyway" [22].

"The ugliest for me was when it carried over into our intimate life, I was just something he owned and could use at will, and kick aside when he was done"[20].

"You don't even think at the time about what you could do" [32].

"",,that's the state of mind I was in at that time, after being so physically and mentally abused by this man" [68].

From Pictures and Themes, Answered Questions

On a personal note once, many many years ago, I was a single mother, standing in a line to collect food stamps. I had talked to four or five counselors and social workers, filled out innumerable sheets of paper work, moved from line to line, clutching forms. I distinctly remember thinking that this was an alien and foreign world to me. I had a college degree at the time, and remember feeling inarticulate and lost, introduced to an alien reality. I thought, "I have a degree. I am an intelligent woman, and yet I am bewildered. What do you do if you don't even know the questions to ask?"

In some life situations, especially when faced with something that seems literally, another world, the questions themselves can be difficult to articulate. This text takes the reader into another world: a world where
horrors are committed in the name of love, where smart women can seem to be rendered idiotic, where the rules are so twisted that leaving or staying seems equally perilous.

The reader searches the faces of the women. They seem normal, they seem “like” rather than “other.” The reader knows, from the title and introduction, that the women have been in relationships where domestic violence was a reality. How can that be? What reasons could the women provide? How can the reader articulate all the questions?

In a sense, narratives solve that dilemma for us. Narratives outline the cast and characters and provide answers in the form of reasons. We understand the logic of stories. And the narratives offered by the former victims provide both an understandable framework for their reality, and an answer to questions the reader might not realize s/he wanted answered.

Thus from the stories offered by the women, the “real” victims and survivors of domestic violence, the reader is provided with a myriad of good reasons for literally any question skeptic citizens might ask:

- Why did you marry/become involved with this man/woman? [See narratives on pages 15, 16, 12, 50, 46, 26, 52, 16, 58, 66, 38]
- When did this start? [Narratives on pages 42, 16, 28, 68]
- Why didn’t you realize what was going on? [pages 58, 46, 48, 68, 16, 12, 42, 52, 26, 60]
- Why did you accept this treatment? [36]
- What made you stay? [16, 28, 48, 54, 44]
- Why did you not leave? [66, 4, 62, 68, 46, 1, 54, 50]
- Why did you go back? [46, 16, 28, 48]
- Why didn’t you just call the police? [54, 10, 48, 38, 50, 4, 22, 24]
- Why didn’t you reach out to get help? [8, 20, 46, 42, 58]
  - What about your family? [18, 20, 14, 38, 50, 68, 56]
  - Your pastor? [46, 48]
  - Why didn’t you trust the system? [48, 38, 1, 50, 44, 22, 24].
- What made you finally leave? [54, 58, 62]
- How did you escape? [4, 54, 58, 62]
- How do you justify your behavior? [42, 52, 26, 34, 36, 20, 1, 8]
- How did you feel? [38, 42, 44, 50, 8, 20, 46, 58, 60, 1, 2, 66, 68]

  One of the most important questions is not even articulated: Who are you? And the equally important answer: I am everywoman. I could be you.

  "Our World" and "Their World"

  Insofar as the narratives provide answers for citizen’s questions, they provide good reasons for viewing the women as other than victims, as normal, as survivors. There is another way, as aforementioned, in which the narrative functions. The narrative reveals a world, the world occupied by the victim. What is both striking and rhetorically valuable is the similarity that can be extrapolated from the victim stories and the familiar de rigeur romantic relationships in the world today.
“Our World”

While much has been written about the “new” family, the dominant social narrative nonetheless favors the romantic grand narrative: courtship, love followed by marriage, children, and “happily ever after” or, at least, married ever after. Particularly in a world that still remembers a controversy sparked by Murphy Brown’s conscious choice to be a single mother, and where many leaders and average people steadfastly support and reiterate the necessity of the nuclear family, there is quite often a stigma against single mothers and broken families. Despite the very real knowledge that Ozzie and Harriet are an idealization of the 1950s, most citizens will acknowledge that an intact, nuclear family, is the norm.

Feminists are not the only persons who have focused attention on the transparent acceptance that women are wives-and-mothers, by virtue of social mores and biological destiny. Even romantic courtly love and notions of chivalry, passed down from the fourteenth century, presuppose the end result is marriage, and marriage is not an institution to be taken lightly.

Women in the world of the 21st century unarguably have more options than their earlier sisters. But there still remains the seductive allure of “doing it the right way” and submitting to a world of romance, courtship, marriage and family. How different, really, is the world of the abused woman?

“Their” World

From the reasons provided in the narrative, the world of the women was not substantially different from that recognized by any rational individual.
First, every woman desired a relationship. They all believed in love. They accepted their relationship as normal, and they wanted very much to be normal. They wanted their relationship to work. They accepted blame. They made excuses. They tried harder when things did not work out. They did not want to be alone. They did not want to be without the beloved. They accepted their role as caregiver. They reached out for help. They bought the package.

The women in Anderson's book present a subtle argument about betrayal. They are steadfast in urging that they should not be defined by their abuse, but by their humanity. In the context of intimate relationships, physical abuse is symptomatic of a more fundamental denial of respect for their human dignity by a partner with whom they have merged their lives. Their betrayal was an act perpetrated by the abuser: the women certainly did not seek or cause that devastation. They were, quite literally, victims, and the same respect, care, compassion and moral commitment should be extended to them as would be extended to victims of any other human tragedy.

Where the Worlds are Different...

The notion of the victim's world functions on two levels, simultaneously. On the one hand, their narratives and pictures attest to their reality in the lifeworld of the reader. They are “modern American women” accessible, on some level, to most readers. Certainly they reveal emotions that are not unique to them or their situation; most readers have known love
and caring, and fear and confusion, and hopes and dreams, and bitter reality. They have held jobs, borne children, participated in relationships.

At the same time, the women in the text present narratives that are largely past-tense. The world they reveal is the world of their past: of their abuse, and their abuser. The reader is led into this world through individual narratives. Although one might build an argument from laws and statistics about violence, that argument would neither engage a shared cultural narrative of romantic relationships that constitutes a world of hopes, acts and choices, nor would it achieve the stated, and imperative, goal of personalizing – in this case, literally “putting a face on”-- victims of domestic violence. Their individual and collective narratives are essential to providing a compelling situation, to providing layer upon layer and picture put up beside picture, offering good reasons to answer readers’ questions, leading to an inescapable call to conscience: I am like you.

Another key, perhaps unexpected consequence, is that the very past-tense of the narratives (“I was”, “s/he used to”, “we planned”) indicates a movement beyond the state and identity of “victim.” These women are no longer victims, but survivors, telling of their former-selves, explaining their then-selves to a current audience. The world they wanted, the world common to all, is the world that can be accepted and shared. The world they lived can only be reached narratively because it is a world that no longer exists: they have left it. They have survived. They have emerged into a world where these stories can be heard, just as their previous cries, as victims, to family,
friends, religious leaders, and the system, were ignored and/or silenced. They were victims of domestic violence and abuse. They are now survivors. They are the bridges between that pain filled and silenced past, and the eternal present that the reader shares.

Two additional things allow for identification, beyond the good reasons and the compellingly presented narrative world. First: the women are very real bridges, able to translate their past experiences, by virtue of good reasons, into a narrative of compelling coherence and fidelity, thus allowing the reader to accept their vernacular persuasion. Their morally compelling tale of undeserved pain, and the call for remediation and change, are not diminished by their no longer being victims. Indeed, that may be the very reason that their narrative compels.

Secondly, they have survived. They are current residents of the world known by you and me, by the reader, by potential publics. They have been to a world of terror and returned, perhaps bloodied and certainly bruised, but they exist in our collective world. Their answers are spoken in our language, in our present reality. It makes sense because it is the language of current experience. “We left. We survived.”

There is a sad, but almost inescapable conclusion: There cannot be a voice of the victim. She could not provide reasons we accept. She didn’t leave. She is not one of us.
Conclusion

The chapter is titled "Making it personal," which reflects the dual nature of the rhetorical task: first, the need to move from "pure victim" to a more accurate, and at the same time more complex, presentation of the victim and her experience. This move is necessary if the definition of domestic violence is to be expanded beyond the limitations of extreme physical battery, to include physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or financial abuse. The women in the text span age, race, ethnicity, economic, education and class boundaries, just as their suffering was physical but also emotional, sexual, financial, spiritual, psychological.

Secondly, the advocates must present a victim who is not "other" whose very ordinary face, personality, hopes, fear and experiences, will serve to explain, justify and demand a call to conscience on the part of the audience: "I am like you. I am not deviant, I did nothing to warrant cruelty."

Anderson's *A Woman Like You* serves as a rhetorical artifact that accomplishes those goals. The text and pictures provide a meta-narrative exemplified by the title: these women are very normal. Their faces, their situations, and their stories serve as a doorway into a world where mistreatment and abuse is vastly more complex than "mere" physical battery, just as the women are far more complex than the one dimensional picture presented of the murdered victims in *Defending Our Lives*.

The nature of their response to mistreatment is also significantly different from that of the "pure" victim, who might engage in violence (only as
a response to severe and escalating violence) and whose whole experience is categorized as extreme abuse and terror. While some of the women did, indeed, experience violence that led them to kill, the clear majority did not.

Their experience of abuse was as varied as their faces. While the abuser's exercise of power and control remain a central and common theme, most of the women -- often not without great hardship and pain -- left their abuser. Quite a few of them went on to healthier relationships, and to fulfilling lives. In this respect, they are living testimonials to the continued existence, diversity and complexity of the issue of domestic violence, and of the women's lived experiences with abuse.

Their stories, presented very much as Graham outlined, follow a natural procedure of argument: a linear sequence of fact upon fact, picture beside picture, that inescapably lead the reader to the situation of the victim. The very ordinary quality of the woman, their recognizability, leads to identification. Further, their individual and collective narrative provide a host of good reasons to explain their actions, to make sense of their experiences, to issue a call to conscience, to exert a moral call for action.

One perhaps unexpected result of this presentation, and one which will need to be examined at a later date, is that, ultimately, these are not stories of victims, but of survivors. To be sure, they were victims, and their transition to survivor does not lessen the validity of their multiple claims. It does, however, provide another set of questions. These women, and their stories, are stories of former victims, and of survival. They have all moved beyond "mere"
victims. What then, of the stories of the victim? Where is she? Can she be heard in a public space, or is her voice only available when she has moved to the status of statistic (Nicole Brown Simpson) or survivor?

The narratives and pictures, together, provide an ethos, a credibility, a situation, a worldview, and a call to a public that cannot be escaped. In reading their stories, studying their faces, we come to the inevitable conclusion: they are like us, and if it could happen to her....
CHAPTER SIX
THE SAFEHOUSE STORY: EXPANDING TERRAIN

Introduction

In previous chapters, we have seen the “evolution” of the public face of domestic violence. We have seen an attempt to control the issue in terms of establishing facticity, remediability and moral obligation, characteristics Gusfield (1981) deems central to ownership of an issue. We have also seen a shift in the image of the victim from a “pure” victim, to a “woman like you.” One key question remains: where do survivors, feminists and activists go from here? After all, the VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) is now law. More and more communities are enacting legislation and procedures to deal with domestic violence perpetrators and victims. It’s a done deal, isn’t it?

Yet the facts, figures and statistics indicate that domestic violence is still a problem, still an issue, and still involved in ownership contestation. As recently as 2000, letters to the editor appeared in the Boulder Daily Camera challenging the feminist attributions of patriarchy as causal. The economy, poor communication skills, feminist lobbying, general male frustration and justified fear of “the system” – other reasons, other scenarios are being offered to account for, perhaps even to cure, the problem of domestic violence. And while the feminists and activists still argue eloquently for the causal combination of patriarchy and power interrelationships, there still
remains the specter that haunts every speech, every presentation, every training session: Why didn’t she do something? What went wrong with their relationship? It could never happen to me… In other words: why is this a social and not an interpersonal relationship problem? Answers provided do not necessarily mean answers accepted.

To assume that the issue, by virtue of public awareness and legal consequences, has been “resolved” in any way is to oversimplify the complex dynamics at the core of the issue. While the crime of battery may indeed be more frequently sanctioned, and while a spade is indeed being more often called a spade where violence is involved, there remain a spectrum of harmful behaviors and attitudes that victims, survivors, and their advocates still see present and looming in today’s social climate.

Moreover, as we have seen in Chapters Four and Five, the “face” of the victim has changed, and issue owners were the ones who engaged in the struggle to make that change. There are material, consequential benefits to the altered presentation of “the victim” – placing the issue under the control of grassroots activists instead of clinical therapeutic challengers; demanding the issue be seen as a moral, public problem deserving of remediation; “proving” that the women are not mentally ill, but normally, eventimes heroically, responding to an abnormal situation; broadening the definition of victim and allowing a personal identification. Much has, indeed, changed. However, like riding the infamous tiger: what do you do next? How does an agency respond to ongoing changes in public perception? How is ownership maintained over
an issue that many would still like to see disappear from public consciousness? You said you wanted laws: now you have them. What more do you want? This chapter will look at the ways Safehouse continues to manage the issue, and represent the faces, and voices, of victims.

**Managing the Public Face of Domestic Violence**

To a very real extent “the public” has a memory as short as the most recent --- or last --- scandal. The general citizen accepts changes with a nod, and moves on to whatever is next in his/her busy and conflicted lives. Drinking and driving is a “reality” they all “know” about. Periodically the “owners” of the issue might have to remind them of how important it is, on holiday weekends, near graduations and proms, because they surely might forget lessons learned at cost, unless, of course, the cost is borne by them, personally. Quite often, those reminders are also punitive in tone: drink, drive and pay the price.

Such, to an extent, is also the case with domestic violence. Most probably tend to forget about it until they hear of an incident that might touch close to home: a local murder/suicide, or domestic violence-related kidnap situation. In Boulder County in 2002, for example, five of the six homicides were domestic violence related (Safehouse information packet, 2003). Each time another one happens, the previous tragedies are trotted out to remind the community of the reality of domestic violence. But that is certainly a “negative” campaign to keep domestic violence as a current and serious
problem in the minds of various publics. It is, quite literally, a "dead end" where the most powerful witness is often a murdered one, far beyond the reach of intercession or remediability. All that remains is for the perpetrator to "pay" for his or her actions.

Boulder County Safehouse advances proactive research and education as a "better" alternative to after-the-fact legal remedies. It has committed a considerable portion of its resources to just that: between 16 and 18 per cent of operating costs (year end reports, 2000, 2001, 2002). Its community education program is consistently and visibly active in attempting to engage a public and challenge existing concepts of domestic violence. Increasingly, its focus is to end all forms of violence. To that end, it adopts a public, political-activist stance. The challenge is to keep the issue, the women, the agenda, in front of a jaded and media-bombarded citizenry; bringing the pathos of reality into lives already stressed by economic, social, political and personal woes.

The Rhetorical Challenge

Control of public perception, indeed of any perception, is fundamentally a rhetorical issue: that dimension of discourse that frames the world in a way that invites assent, influences choice, judgment, and reality. To that end, problems with perception, with ownership, with social change, are rhetorical problems.

In the case of Boulder County Safehouse, the structure of the organization impacts attempts at formation of an engaged public. This
feminist organization is located at the boundary of public and private spheres: it has both a public face and presence (as it attempts to assert and maintain ownership of the issue of domestic violence), and it has a private identity, as it shelters, responds to the needs of victims of abuse, and attempts to empower those victims. The organization also sponsors and runs two buildings: the Shelter, and the Outreach (Administrative) building, which correspond to the private and public functions, respectively.

As described in Chapter Two, there is a symbolic and symbiotic relationship between the two physical structures. While the shelter provides the *raison d'être* for the outreach building, it also represents an emotional and ethical boundary whose parameters cannot be breached: people who visit are sworn to secrecy, narratives engendered or shared cannot cross into the public – no matter how persuasive and helpful an appeal it might make -- because the shelter is as it is named: a haven. Women must be protected there. Women are heard in that protected space.

In a sense that is both ironic and paradoxical the shelter is one [admittedly *quasi-*] public place where the voice of the victim is heard – but the “voices” and their narratives stay in the shelter. The voices of victims are heard and validated, but to make the transition into the public, the narrative must be carried by another (with all key details disguised to protect the victim) or must be the first-person narrative of a survivor. Come to shelter to be heard, but know that no-one outside these walls will hear your story unless you change yourself from victim to survivor. For those advocates and
volunteers who have committed their lives and time to combating domestic violence, there is a wealth of rhetorical opportunities inaccessible to them: they are bound by ethics to protect the vulnerable and thus are an ironic part of silencing them.

And while the Outreach is actively engaged in public contestation for issue ownership, control, definition and framing, a great deal of its public ethos comes from work done in the Shelter. That work, however, is presented to the public most often in the form of statistics; how many calls answered, how many women helped, how many turned away. If the organization presents narratives, so much detail has been changed as to render the storyteller faceless: “Rosa” or “Mina” or “Anike.” Their attempt to call a public requires, as we have seen in previous chapters, some use of narratives, but they are hampered in the narratives that they can use: they are most often forced to “fall back” to the metanarrative of patriarchy because the wealth of interpersonal narratives shared in Shelter are off limits.

In part because of the two physical structures (and their corresponding “public” and “private” aspects), but more often because of the symbolic and ethical considerations, resulting in its nature as a boundary spanning entity, Safehouse must address multiple audiences as it attempts to shape perceptions of domestic violence, and calls its public into existence to affect change.

In sum, the rhetorical problems facing the organization of Safehouse include: 1) providing public identities – face and voice – to victims as they
transition from private to public; 2) maintaining ownership of the issue of
domestic violence, while keeping the issue fresh and vital in the minds of
public and private citizens (the move to “social justice”); and 3) redefining the
issue and the face of the victim as new knowledge and theory presents itself
(i.e. expanding the concept of “survivor”) keeping in mind that all these
problems involve appeals to multiple audiences, interior and exterior to
Safehouse itself, who are members of its public.

Data Set Information

In examining Safehouse “public” documents, the aim was to assess
those documents which were 1) generally available to the public (newsletters,
brochures and the “20-Year Herstory” booklet) as well as 2) documents used
to influence its public, to assist in the construction of a public face, and voice,
of domestic violence. To that end, documents in category two include training
materials for the general “volunteer” (now referred to as “paraprofessional”) training, held twice a year, and a training packet used by the Speaker’s
Bureau.

Data Descriptions

Newsletters. Newsletters are seasonal, published four times a year.
The winter issue is primarily a “Year in Review” presentation of the previous
year’s activities. It includes a chronicle of events presented by the Director; a
page of statistics (see Appendix); and a graphic which displays, in pie-chart
format, the revenue, expenditures and expense by program.
Regular newsletter features include the page one highlighted event or news item; page two, with the exception of the "Year in Review" issue, is dedicated to a "Letter from the Director" (Anne Tapp). Page three is the quarterly report; page four contains "News & Views," which includes an article in Spanish and updates pertinent to presentations/education; page five is dedicated to Volunteers, and includes recognition and news for volunteers; pages six and seven are usually "Community Funding and Events." The final page is a foldover: half is the mailing and return address, and the other half is the "wish list" of items the Shelter and Administrative offices could use.

_Brochures_. While there are a great many brochures available at Safehouse, most of them tend to be event-specific. For example, there are multiple brochures advertising the Social Justice series, and individual flyers advertising each month’s offering. There is a volunteer newsletter, geared exclusively to (primarily recognition of) internal volunteer audiences featuring pictures and names of members of different “teams” along with information specific to that team. The Volunteer Application form is a four-page application with accompanying flyer describing volunteer opportunities and expected date and time commitments. There is also a Community Education Forum flyer, offering “community training on a variety of topics related to social justice and violence prevention” to “share with your organization, business or professional group” [cite]. The trainers are Safehouse paid staff.

There is also, for public consumption, a brochure — a booklet -- of which the organization is extremely proud. Put together by volunteers in
1999, it represents an essential piece of Safehouse’s history, or, as they name it, the “herstory.”

**Boulder County Safehouse: A 20-Year Herstory**

This 1999 publication opens with “A Resident’s Story,” which is followed by “The Safehouse Story.” The booklet is 8 x 11 inches, on glossy paper. Pages are unnumbered. Pictures are black and white, the accent color is peach or pale terra cotta. Articles are sometimes framed, sometimes placed on a block of the peach color.

On the outside margin of each page runs a timeline of key events from 1972 through 1999. Within the borders of the timeline is a running narrative of the development of Safehouse. The booklet also contains black and white pictures of events, scenes, and key individuals in the development of Safehouse. There is also a boxed article called “A Safe Place” whose descriptor is “this is a story of Marta....” The narrative is written in Spanish.

There are sections titled “Thoughts from the Architect;” “Programs” (including Emergency Shelter, Advocacy, Outreach Services and Education); “Volunteers;” and “Funding.” The next three pages include a poem, entitled “I Didn’t Run Away” by “Maria, 1993;” another poem familiar to many women, entitled “Comes the Dawn” by “Anonymous;” and a “Letter to a Battered Woman” from “Suzanne.”

The booklet ends with a section “Envisioning a Future Without Violence,” and another poem “Thank You Clarissa” by “Robin, 1993.” The final page is an almost full page photograph of a blond woman, suitcase in
one hand, toddler in a cowboy hat on the other, apparently entering a lighted room. She is walking away from the viewer, through a doorway, into a lighted room. Behind her is darkness, and a porch covered with fallen leaves.

**Volunteer Training Information**

**Paraprofessional Training.** Safehouse conducts an intensive volunteer training in the winter and summer of each year. The training requires pre-screening of candidates: a four page application must be filled out, and an interview scheduled with the volunteer coordinator. Volunteers must be “accepted” before being allowed to commence training. Part of the interview attempts to assess whether volunteers who are survivors of domestic abuse have sufficiently recovered from the experience to avoid re-traumatization during the training.

A time commitment to attend all three weeks of sessions is also required. There are 10 sessions in all: Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 7 – 10 p.m., and Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. – approximately 50 hours of training.

The first two weeks are generalized training, followed by a week of specialized training in the area the volunteer has chosen. Areas include shelter volunteers (staff the crisis line and assist counselors in the shelter); victim advocates (provide “immediate, in-person response at the scene of a battering incident”); court advocates (accompany clients to court hearings, help in the process of obtaining a restraining order, advocate on behalf of clients during interactions with court officials); children’s volunteers (“provide
a safe place for kids to play and 'be kids' by facilitating individual and group
activities for children at the shelter...); tri-city volunteers (who work on the
crisis line in Lafayette) and administrative volunteers (who work at the
Outreach Center, and for whom the 50 hour training is optional\(^5\)).

Topics covered in training include recognizing violence; the cycle of
violence; training to counsel victims; barriers that prevent women from leaving
abusive relationships; public presentations on the issue; viewing the movie
*Defending Our Lives*; presentation of statistics about violence nationally and
locally; a visit to the shelter; and a day where related social problems
including ageism, heterosexism, classism, able-ism, and racism are
presented as contributing to the maintenance of a society that tolerates
domestic abuse.

The training packet, titled *An Introduction to Domestic Violence: Fact
sheets compiled by Boulder County Safehouse*, contains the following:
Safehouse Mission; Boulder County Safehouse Fact Sheet; Safehouse
Services – Brief Overview; A Philosophy of Empowerment; Barriers to
Leaving; Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Relationship; The Cycle of
Violence; Early Warning Signs of Potential Abuse; Types of Verbal or
Emotional Abuse; The Impact of Witnessing Violence on Children [which
would more accurately be titled: witnessing violence: the impact on children];
Hints That Child Abuse May Be Occurring; Frequently Asked Questions; Age-
Specific Indicators; and Safety Planning.

\(^5\) All information from current, 2003, "Volunteer and Internship Opportunities at Boulder County
Safehouse" brochure and volunteer application.
Volunteers are also asked to commit to actually working for the shelter or outreach program: the training is to create educated workers, not merely to educate the general public. There are other services which focus on public education, including the Speaker’s Bureau.

**Speaker’s Bureau.** The Speaker’s Bureau is a subset of volunteer training. It was revived in 2002, and its purpose is “to end domestic violence through education and social change. We engage the public in dialogue about the issues, Safehouse services, and volunteer and employment opportunities through Booths, Fairs, Special Events, Lecture, and Interactive Workshops” (Safehouse Volunteer Newsletter, Spring 2002, p. 5). The bureau involves people who, as the name implies, are providing personal interface with various populations who want to know more about the issue of Domestic Violence, and Safehouse in particular.

Volunteer speakers address diverse groups, including schools, clubs, and community organizations. They also regularly staff booths at such events as the Boulder Creek Festival, the 9News Health fair and various nonprofit fairs; provide resources for a special NGO (nongovernmental organization) Summit and Conference Reception; create and offer workshops for the University of Colorado at Boulder’s International Women’s Week; and deliver police briefings to the Boulder Police Department on links between animal abuse and domestic violence. While there is an active school-based educational component operating through the Outreach center (called
Choices and Change educational curriculum), the Speaker’s Bureau is a more broadly based community outreach program.

Many of the participants in the Speaker’s Bureau are themselves former victims of domestic violence. To that extent, they, and their narratives, serve as a/the “face” and “voice” of domestic violence. Like volunteers for the paraprofessional training, they must interview and be accepted to the bureau. To the extent that they have experienced domestic violence, or ‘intimate partner violence’ they must be self identified as survivors, or attest that they “were once victims” of domestic abuse, again, to discourage re-traumatization of women and/or exploitation.

The Speaker’s Bureau Presentation Packet includes the following: a general presentation outline, followed by expanded data, exercises, suggestions, and options for presentation [See “DV101 Presentation Outline” in Appendix E]. The expanded information section includes a section from Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices (Davies, 1998) which outlines Batterer Generated and Life Generated Risks.

I will examine how these data sets, and Safehouse public presentations, act to solve the rhetorical problems of redefining the issue, maintaining ownership of the issue, and providing voice to the victim.

**Changing the Identity of “The Victim”**

If attempts to create social change can be seen as a “macro” level of activity, Safehouse also has a “micro,” perhaps more private, side and agenda: empowerment of victims. This involves focus on individual women
and their children: community members and shelter victims who rely on Safehouse for individual assistance. This agenda involves helping victims move from a private persecution to a public life; from a downtrodden and silenced existence to a public identity as a survivor. While the mission of empowerment has not changed, the terms and material conditions of that empowerment have evolved.

I had noticed, from my first involvement with, and observation of, the battered women's movement in 1994, that there seemed to be an inescapable dichotomy in perceptions of battered women: women were either "survivors" or "victims." There never seemed to be an intermediate ground: no "recovering but still in the relationship;" no "I'm almost ready to leave for the final time, as soon as Billy finishes college." There were clearly established definitions: leave = survivor; return = victim (with the understanding, based on the "cycle of violence," [Walker, 1979] that violence always escalates, barring outside or systemic intervention, thus many victims make the transition to statistics, as murdered partners...). I sincerely doubt that anyone, in 1995, who heard of a woman who returned to her abuser, would consider that woman to be anything but a potential statistic: increasingly broken, beaten, hopeless, lost...

In 2003, however, the open acknowledgment that returning to an abuser/abusive situation might be an option a coherent, rationally-thinking woman could choose, marked an obvious change. Over the past few years, Safehouse has come to rely on a text which, according to Lisa Olcese,
Director of Education, has "radically changed our outlook and ways of dealing with victims" of domestic violence. The book is titled Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices (Davies, 1998). It is presented as a key, recommended reference for any and all activists and volunteers.

Prior to adoption of the Davies book, the recommended text was Next Time She'll Be Dead by Jones (1994). Jones' book was the "bible" of Safehouse training in 1995: it was one of the first mass market, trade-sized paperbacks that attempted to outline, define, and assign responsibility for the issue of domestic violence. Written by a former victim, it presented statistics and stories. It also, as we shall see later, presented an attempt, much like Defending Our Lives, to present the issue as though arguing for the facticity and remediability of domestic abuse. It was very much like the earlier "pure victim" narrative, in that it dealt with severe violence and victims severely debilitated by that violence, torture and terror. Indeed, there is a large section (one out of six chapters, and one of the longest at 32 pages) which deals with the "story" of Hedda Nussbaum, a women so severely debilitated that she was unable to stop her partner, Joel Steinberg, from murdering their foster daughter. Again, Hedda is almost a perfect stereotype for the pure victim model, which focuses on the physical torture and mental abuse suffered by victims.

By virtue of the presentation in the Jones' text, victims who left shelter and returned to relationships were often viewed as women to be pitied, lost
souls, helplessly disappearing into the mist of pain and punishment. In many respects that is certainly true, as evidenced by statistics that women leave abusers multiple times before they successfully remove themselves from the abusive relationships. However, Davies' 1998 book challenged that outlook: sometimes women make "rational" choices to return to an abusive relationship. Women are capable of making assessments of batterer-generated and life-generated risks.

Batterer-generated risks involve seven broad categories: physical injury, psychological harm, risks to and involving the children, financial risks, risk to or about family and friends, loss of relationship, and risks involving arrest or legal status (Davies, 1998, p. 2). Life generated risks, often called social or environmental risks, include (and this is considered a partial list) "financial, home location, physical and mental health, inadequate responses by major social institutions, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other bias" (p. 53).

**Complexity and the Call for "Representative Thinking"**

This presents yet another view of women involved in abusive situations. It broadens and makes exponentially more complex any attempt to generalize or categorize the women, their situations, and possible solutions. In earlier presentations of victim and survivor, delineations were [admittedly, overly] simple: survivors left the relationships, victims went back to their abuser, and victims often died, thus transitioning to statistics. This "new" face presents a rhetoric that refigures the battered woman as having a
more complex set of choices than the reductionistic victim/survivor binary. It also asks a reader to engage in an act of what Hanna Arendt terms representative thinking:

Forming an opinion, as distinct from holding to blind prejudice, requires the ability to see things from the multiple perspectives of those who are present in the public realm, or what Arendt terms *representative thinking* (cited in Hauser, 1999, p. 94).

In *Between Past and Future* Arendt asserts:

> The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representational thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion. (cited in Hauser, 1999, p. 94)

The process of arriving at important political decisions requires more than internal debate or reflection: it requires discourse and the presence, perhaps even the narratives, of others. It is inherent in the formation of active vernacular public spheres. Thus, Hauser concludes

> The method for using representative thinking to arrive at political choice is rhetoric. Contemplation alone is insufficient to arrive at judgment of this sort; it requires deliberative conversations to explore the self-disclosing phenomenality of the event, to discriminate among conflicting phenomena within it, and to arrive at what Arendt herself regarded as the communal basis of the vita activa: a *common sense* of reality on which our judgment rests. (p. 99)

Thus as the rhetorical framing of battered women is changed, and the portrait of survivor may include women who chose to return to a violent relationship, the challenge to Safehouse also becomes more complex. Absent satisfying, if static, binary concepts of battered women as “either/or” — victim or survivor -- the potential public is asked to engage in a more complex level of
thinking: a representational mode that involves an increasingly active commitment to engage in discourse pursuant to opinion and judgment formation.

**Practical Considerations and Organizational Actions**

The radical nature of this rhetorical change cannot be stressed too keenly. Before, survivors were the “winners” because they escaped the relationship. Victims were the “losers” because they went back, often never to be heard from again, sometimes to be tragically remembered as a statistic. The binary frame of survivor/victim encouraged the perception that domestic violence was an issue that could be described ultimately as a matter of life and death: remember that *Defending Our Lives* referred to a “war” against women and children. Similarly, *Next Time She’ll be Dead* uses both the war metaphor and battlefield statistics indicating that domestic violence takes more lives than recent military encounters, including the Vietnam war.

The continuing high numbers of women murdered by abusers testifies to the fact that it often is a matter of life and death. However, the new text, and the way Safehouse appropriates it, indicates a revision in the definition of the “survivor.” This redefinition of survivor is part of a ripple effect that can be seen in Safehouse’s current focus on not merely eradicating domestic violence, but in calling for even larger-scale social change, under the banner of a call for “peace for all women and children” and a new focus on the more broad *topos* of social justice.
Of Risks and Justice

Remember that Davies’ (1998) “batterer-generated risks” was only half of the risk assessment. While probably more familiar to those who followed the earliest rhetorical constructions of domestic abuse (physical injury, psychological harm, risks to and involving the children, financial risks, risk to or about family and friends, loss of relationship, and risks involving arrest or legal status) these “batterer generated risks” can be seen as the strikingly similar to answers provided by many of the women in both Defending our Lives and A Woman Like You when asked “Why didn’t you leave?” They are most probably familiar to people who engage in discussion about the victim and the reality of domestic violence.

The other half of Davies’ risk assessment involved “life-generated risks”: Physical and mental health, and “inadequate responses by major social institutions and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other bias” (p. 53). Note that “life-generated risks” might reasonably be titled “societally-generated risks,” and once that association has been seen and/or accepted, it opens the door to the construction of social justice as central to remediation of domestic violence. Social justice for all, especially for women and children, becomes a prerequisite to the elimination of domestic violence as a social problem. A focus on “social justice” also allows an expansion of the ownership claims, which we will examine later.

Thus the evolving rhetoric of empowerment attempts to address the complexity of a woman’s choice by figuring her in a way that demands each
woman’s case be considered *sui generis*. This also has the rhetorical efficacy of addressing the niggling *why* questions.

Further, as the rhetorical construction of the issue expands beyond “pure victim” its range of ownership claims correspondingly broadens. While it may not cover the full spectrum of reality, “black” and “white” are relatively easy to describe, and one term is often framed by its opposite (like “victim” and “survivor”). When the issue turns into presentations of many shades of grey, the issue becomes more complex, and so does the attempt to describe those shades. All battered women are not pure victims, all situations do not involve extreme physical battery, legislation alone apparently cannot eradicate intimate partner violence. How then to maintain ownership and control of the issue when shades of grey replace black and white? Is Safehouse riding the tiger, or controlling it?

**The Exercise of Ownership: Expanded Terrain**

In Chapter Three we first discussed Gusfield’s (1981) presentation of ownership of public issues. He uses the metaphor of property ownership to describe public issue ownership. While the four qualities he lists as central to both forms of ownership (control, exclusiveness, transferability, and potential loss [p. 10]) remain important, one other aspect of property ownership becomes more visible: terrain.

In changing the face of the victim, in rhetorically reconstructing the binary simplicity and presenting a much more complex picture of the issue, Safehouse has arguably increased the terrain which they must manage as a
problem owner. While there is no clear moment at which one might point and say “This is the before and this is the after,” remember that grassroots activists were primarily focused on framing the issue as one of societal concern, societal responsibility: the cause was patriarchy, the responsibility fell upon society, specifically through police, the courts, legislation and public condemnation, to remediate the issue. The Boulder County Safehouse mission statement in 1995:

The mission of Boulder County Safehouse, Inc., is to provide safe shelter, support, and advocacy for battered women and their children, and to work toward an end to domestic violence through educating the wider community and networking with other community agents (Safehouse training packet, Fall, 1995)

Although education and networking remain key priorities, much of that work has been accomplished: there is a religious outreach ministry, professional seminars, trained speakers, nationally recognized education programs for elementary and middle-schoolers. The 2002 mission statement is almost identical, but with a rhetorically telling difference:

The mission of Boulder County Safehouse, Inc., is to provide safe shelter, support, and advocacy for battered women and their children and to end domestic violence through education and social change. (Safehouse Paraprofessional Training packet, 2002, italics added)

While one could argue that social change was implicit in the Safehouse agenda, even from its foundation in 1979, explicitly labeling “social change” as a mission is significant. That wording implies an agenda beyond “stopping men from battering women” and a more active role than merely asserting that patriarchy is the cause. Moreover it reflects the changing terrain that their ownership oversees: social justice is now the umbrella, and underneath lie
areas discussed in training on what insiders have been known to refer to as “ism-day;” able-ism, ageism, heterosexism, ethnicity and racism, class-ism.

Earlier claims of ownership may have been targeted merely --- and I do use that word cautiously --- at domestic battery, however now Safehouse is extending its scope to claim ownership interest in other issues. The physical and psychological safety of women and children are still the focus, but the argument has been expanded to indicate that there will not be true peace for women and children until all the “isms” have been cured. Indeed, under their logo on all newsletters are the words “Envisioning a Future Without Violence.” The same logo and words appear on fliers for the Social Justice Seminar Series, general Safehouse information brochures, publicity materials for fundraising, the Volunteer and Internship Opportunities application, and the “What every congregation needs to know about domestic violence...” brochure.

Thus Safehouse has managed to rhetorically construct social injustice as equated with violence to women and children. Patriarchy may still be the cause of social injustice, power and inequality are certainly at the root, but there is a different focus: the umbrella of ownership now arguably extends beyond battery to more subtle forms of social violence.

**The Social Justice Series**

One clear example of the extended umbrella of ownership is the Social Justice Series sponsored by Safehouse. As published in numerous individual fliers and highlighted in newsletters, the social justice series is a form of
community education. In the Winter 2000 newsletter, “Year in Review” article, by Safehouse director Anne Tapp:

Additional community education efforts occurred through the Safehouse Social Justice Series. These monthly lunchtime discussions included a gender analysis of domestic violence, women in prison, immigration and child abduction, feminist perspectives on mercy killing, intimate partner rape, and anti-racist activism. (p. 1)

And later in the same article:

In collaboration with the CU Law School and Latina/o service providers, Safehouse hosted “immigration Challenges in Boulder County,” a day-long symposium which addressed immigration law, deportation issues, and domestic violence and its impact on immigration status. (p3)

Thus education and outreach on domestic violence now incorporates issues such as immigration and child abduction, feminist perspectives on mercy killing, deportation issues, and anti-racist activism. This seems to be a far broader net of influence than was cast by the foremothers, who were primarily concerned with removing women and children from situations of physical violence and battery.

In the 2001 newsletter “Year in Review” article, Tapp describes the education efforts:

The Safehouse Education Program, through the 2001 Social Justice Series and other community outreach efforts, provided opportunities to advance our understanding of and response to domestic violence. Substance abuse and addiction, gender differences in violence, health care and domestic violence, elder abuse, and art as a tool for healing were just some of the innovative topics...(Safehouse Winter 2002 newsletter, p.1)

Note that, not only is the outreach an attempt to educate the public, it is an attempt to “advance our understanding of and response to domestic violence.” In educating the public and sharing their views, Safehouse not only
advances its own institutional and individual understanding (which they would most likely describe as sharing stories with similarly concerned individuals) but they literally advance their understanding – putting forward their view, their argument, their narrative about the world – by sharing it with individuals who may respond to the call and form a public which can authorize remediation of these [expanded] issues.

In the Winter 2003 issue, Anne Tapp begins the Year in Review article with the words “The work of Boulder County Safehouse is fundamentally about personal and social transformation” (p.1). She continues:

Throughout 2002, Safehouse served as a doorway to transformation for thousands of individuals impacted by domestic violence. 2002 was also a year in which social transformation was made possible through the numerous partnerships between Safehouse and other community groups working to ensure safety, peace and justice. (p. 1)

It does not require a gargantuan intelligence to grasp the rhetorical shift made by the organization: Safehouse now works with “other community groups” to “ensure safety, peace and justice.” We’re not just about battery anymore....

Yes, Chris, and that is all interesting, fascinating in fact. But what about narratives? Isn’t that part of the focus of your dissertation? Indeed.

**Safehouse And The Use Of Narratives**

There are two levels of narratives most frequently used by Safehouse. One level, the meta-level if you will, is a narrative that states there are horrible things that happen to women in this world; the world is a dangerous place to be for women, and sometimes the place that should be safest --- the home ---
is the most dangerous. Because we care, we chose to be part of the solution and the solution requires social action...Here is the way we will enact a better world for all women and children...

This meta-narrative is framed and given life through the “paraprofessional” training program sponsored by Safehouse twice yearly. It is interesting to note that, in all the documentation provided in training, there are not specific narratives of victims, or survivors present. The presentation of the video *Defending Our Lives* is the closest official presentation of voices of survivors and, while certainly impactful, it is once again, a distanced and mediated presentation.

While the metanarrative is reinforced in the presentation of statistics and through the aforementioned “-ism” day in training (able-ism, age-ism, heterosexism, etc) where patriarchy is shown to impact many other subsets of discrimination, the only “narrative” in the training packet is of the cycle of violence (per Walker, 1987). This cycle describes (and asserts to be inescapably true) an escalating spiral of abuse and posits three consecutive phases: tension building, acute battering, and the honeymoon phase, during which the abuser attempts to apologize, woo, and court the victim.

The clear majority of training involves information: *logos*. Indeed the training packet is self-described as a “selection of fact sheets.” Questions are presented and answered: Why does she stay? (lists of reasons are provided). What happens when/if she leaves? (statistics are advanced about the danger to women once they have left the relationship). How does this affect children?
(again, lists and statistics are offered). There are no individual narratives present in any of the training materials in the training packet.

A second level of narratives, personal stories, is, however, present in training. Remember that volunteers are screened. This is not a random audience of general public persons. These are people who have gone through some effort to be present. They have committed time and energy to being a part of the process. They have applied and been accepted. Many are former victims, or people who know victims from their neighborhood, their family, their close circle of friends. Many of those involved as trainers have, themselves, been victims, or close to victims.

In short, the audience is a very specialized group: one predisposed to hear information and share narratives. While the audience members may not know facts and figures about domestic abuse, facts and figures provided in abundance by the Safehouse training, they have experience with the issue. Their experience is solicited in training, during the 50 hours of group work, and their experience is oftentimes shared in narrative form. Narratives are shared at introductions, in workshops, over lunch on Saturdays. They are as common as a hello, and considered important, especially as there is almost a status to being a "survivor."

Thus training not only provides volunteers with a specialized vocabulary and facts/figures/statistics to describe the issue of domestic violence, it also is a forum for the sharing of narratives. Those narratives, combined with rationally-impressive data, offer the volunteer not only
arguments to offer the general public, but a mental warehouse of stories, presented by fellow volunteers, that attest to the reality and personal consequences of domestic violence.

**Other Public Forums for Narratives**

Two other special mediums exist for directly interacting, calling, and informing publics: educational outreach, through the Speaker’s Bureau, and the Safehouse publications, in this case the quarterly newsletter, and a special brochure: “Boulder County Safehouse: A 20-Year Herstory.” It is important to note that education director considers community building a mandate. The presence of venacular rhetoric, often in the form of narratives, can be seen in both venues.

Part of educational outreach and community building is the aforementioned Speaker’s Bureau. Comprised of volunteers, most of whom have directly experienced domestic violence, all of whom are activists for the Safehouse and the feminist perception of patriarchal involvement in the issue, the Speaker’s Bureau is both visible and vocal. The volunteers are trained and educated in the facts and statistics surrounding battery as an issue. Moreover, their own personal narratives are solicited in the “introduction” section of the presentation, and are used to establish credibility. Thus through the Speaker’s Bureau, first-person survivor narratives may make their way into a public.

Yet another very public outreach is in the form of newsletters. Newsletter and public reports are circulated quarterly to interested members
of the public. While narratives are not present in each issue, there are third person stories in almost every newsletter, often in the form of stories related by the Boulder County Safehouse director, Anne Tapp, in her column. Sometimes stories are related in articles written by volunteers. Most often the newsletter reports activities, asks for contributions, disseminates facts and statistics about domestic violence in Boulder County, and informs about upcoming events.

While the "reports" can be seen as topos presenting Safehouse as an organization concerned with current societal events, fiscal responsibility, educational imperatives, committed to its volunteers and community, responsive and responsible, those topos act at the metanarrative level: here is what Safehouse, the organization, is and does and stands for. It is virtually impossible to hear the voice or story of the/a victim. Individual narratives are supplemental, not the core, and those narratives which make it into print are almost always about someone else: there are very few first person accounts from survivors, and only occasionally a poem or verse credited to "Anna, aged 12." Readers are unable to ascertain anything more about the status or credibility of the storyteller.

In direct contrast, the brochure "A 20-year Herstory" is, quite literally, story upon story, narrative upon narrative. As described in a previous section, the word "story" is sprinkled liberally throughout the booklet, from the "story of Marta" to poems by victims and survivors, and a "letter to an abused woman" from "Suzanne." The narrative format is clear and compelling: not
only does it blend the “narrative” of the organization, but the *Herstory* also focuses on “her-story” highlighting a few individual women as a victim, or a survivor, of domestic violence. It is the single most obvious compilation and dissemination of narrative(s) in the Boulder County Safehouse collection of public documents.

Having said that, the “victims” remain faceless: they are indicated by first names only, they are represented by a picture of a woman walking from darkness to light, and while their narratives provide pathos, and perhaps insight, they provide only a one-dimensional picture of a victim: she is a name, or she is a symbolic photograph. There is not the sense that there is a real, touchable individual present. And while Safehouse does an admirable job of speaking for the victim, there is always the sense that they are speaking *for*, that the woman, herself, remains absent and silent.

**Conclusions: From Domestic Violence To Social Justice?**

We have seen how Safehouse, as an organization, attempts to manage and control the issue of domestic violence in a post-VAWA society. We have seen how the adoption of a particular text, Davies (1998) *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex lives/Difficult choices*, has had an impact on their perception, and representation, of the face of the battered woman. Women move beyond “merely” being victims of physical battery, or survivors who have left the relationship. They make rational assessments of
complex risk factors and sometimes chose to return to an abusive situation, throwing the “victim or survivor” dichotomy into disarray. Empowering women may mean tossing cherished definitions out the window.

Moreover, as the picture of the abused woman moves from a binary simplicity, to a complex presentation of reality, the demand is made for representational thinking on the part of a public called to render judgment and actualize remediation on behalf of this increasingly complex face.

Moreover, the terrain over which Safehouse claims ownership has expanded. Domestic violence becomes reframed as interpersonal violence. When life-generated risks can be seen as societally generated risks, Safehouse’s self-decreed mandate to “protect women and children” can be seen as an expanded ownership terrain, as evidenced by its attempt own an issue that can now be reframed as “social justice.”

The original analysis of the rhetorical problem was three-fold: empower victims; maintain ownership; reconfigure the issue as appropriate. Safehouse has managed to mount a campaign of ownership that allows for a complex reframing of the face of the victim, re-charts the boundaries of the issue, and asserts ownership over an increasingly large terrain: from domestic violence to social justice.

A Silence

While Safehouse’s metanarrative advances its claims as socially, fiscally, and morally responsible; while statistics and data, facts and figures continue to argue for Gusfield’s facticity and remediability; and while third
person individual narratives advance the pathos of otherwise invisible women
victim/survivors and demand moral imperatives calling a public to act, there
remains a silence.

There are people aplenty to speak *for* the victim. And there remains a
-- perhaps inescapable -- conclusion that the victim remains, after all,
silenced.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

When I first began this research I was certain of a few things: I was intrigued by narratives and their many uses, specifically as means of persuasion; I thought domestic violence was a social issue that I should and could write about (the apparent victim/survivor dichotomy niggled at me: why was there no "between"?); I was interested in public reactions to the issue of domestic abuse, including questions of who has access to "the public," and how impressions are formed; finally, I wanted somehow to use narratives and public rhetoric together. From that came my research question:

How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse use narratives to negotiate the public/private boundary in presentations of domestic violence in the public sphere?

What I didn't know was that there was a viable project in that mass and mess. I had two texts that fascinated me, as a storyteller and story analyst: the movie \textit{Defending Our Lives} which I had regarded from my first viewing as a rhetorical \textit{tour de force}, and the book \textit{A Woman Like You}, which also seemed to be a poignant way to bring the issue of battered women into a form of public focus. I had trained as a volunteer at Boulder County
Safehouse in 1995, and recognized the organization as a prime stakeholder in the issue, so their views and public presentations were important to any analysis.

I began studying narratives in 1995, and publics theory shortly thereafter. I soon realized that there was no convenient “Public”—no behemoth to be wooed and courted. Instead, there were latticed and reticulate publics who, by means of sharing a common understanding, informed and enhanced by vernacular discourse, engaged in the practical business of critical publicity and judgment leading to social action. Who would have thought, back then, that my advisor would devote such a large part of his research to something I could personally use in my dissertation???

Dr. Hauser also introduced me to the work of Gusfield (1981), whose theories on public problems proved invaluable because he so brilliantly poses --- and conveniently answers --- key questions to my own project: why do some issues become public problems, and not others? Who speaks for key stakeholders? How is the public terrain divided and controlled?

While Gusfield focused on the issue of drinking and driving, there were many undeniable similarities between that and domestic violence: both were championed by grassroots movements, both involved violence and life and death issues, both had alternative discourse available – they were contested topics. Finally, both were issues that were, ultimately, recognized as owned, in the one case by MADD and in the other by grassroots feminist organizations, usually those affiliated with domestic abuse shelters.
One key difference that I learned from my research is that, while the issue of drinking and driving seems to have reified in the larger forum of public opinion (new presentations reinforce the already existing stereotypes of innocent lives lost because someone drank while impaired) that sense of solidification seems to be missing in the issue of domestic violence. As we have seen, the presenting “face” of the victim has evolved, the very definition of victim and survivor has changed, and the terrain over which issue control is exerted remains contested as Safehouse engages in an attempt to “own” the issue of social justice – at least locally.

**Questions And (Some) Answers**

How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse, use narratives to reframe a “private matter/private issue” as a public and political responsibility?

To answer that question, we turn to Gusfield, who illustrates that any attempt to move an issue into the public sphere requires key ingredients: there must be an owner, (an often highly contested role, because it is the owner(s) who frames the issue, assigns causal and political responsibility for “fixing” the problem, and is positioned as an expert to whom members of the general public defer in addressing the issue). Moreover, the issue must be seen as being real (possessing facticity), it must be “fix-able” (possessing remediability) and there must be a sense of moral obligation, felt by the members of society, to resolve the problem.
Just establishing domestic violence as possessing those characteristics was a long and agonistic rhetorical struggle that involved contestation between grassroots and clinical-professional advocates, resulting in the “pure victim” construction of the battered woman, which presented the issue as real, as curable if immediate social action is taken, made direct appeals to the conscience of citizens to intervene on behalf of the victim, and ultimately cast blame on the failure of the police, courts and judicial system to intervene and protect the women.

The “pure victim” was subsequently replaced by a narrative that included a more personalized victim/survivor, who has remained even as advocates attempt to increase the terrain over which they claim ownership. At every step of the process, narratives were used to help frame and re-frame the issue as one worthy of public attention and remediation.

**Historical Contextualization**

Remember that at the earliest stages of the battered woman’s movement, the primary questions concerned recognition of the issue as worthy of public remediation: the struggle was to have domestic violence seen as more than just “normal relational difficulties.” It was a “private” issue that required and deserved “public” intervention. Advocates demanded that domestic battery be treated as the crime they perceived it to be. They had to overcome the inertia imposed by the status quo, which clearly viewed as “private” those actions that occurred between husband and wife, or committed intimate partners.
Domestic violence as an issue benefited from the consciousness raising movement of the early 1960s and 70s, which linked both domestic violence and sexual assault, and viewed them as being matters of intense personal, and political, concern to the growing feminist movement. In myriad small groups across the country, publics formed, concerned with the outlines, scope, presentation and solution of an issue that they felt mandated social involvement.

They did not, however, meet in a vacuum. As proponents argued for public remediation, the form and attributions of that remediation were challenged. Opponents, in the person of clinicians, mental health and social workers, were frankly more socially acceptable “expert” speakers than their grassroots feminist counterparts. They argued that the cause of domestic violence was interpersonal dysfunction, thus it was a problem between individuals, often seen as mental illness and amenable to interpersonal or couples’ counseling. Had that attribution been followed to its logical conclusion, the issue could not have been seen as a matter of public, social concern; it would have been born and died in the realm of the private.

In an attempt to illustrate that victims of domestic battery were not mentally ill, the concept of the pure victim was put forward as an alternative “face” of the victim. You will remember that the four characteristics of the pure victim placed her as suffering but sane, responding to violence only when violence was dealt her, caught in a spinning cycle of emotional and physical abuse, and (understandably, perhaps even rationally) terrified by the
experience. The documentary *Defending Our Lives* provides an example of narrative(s) told by a number of “pure victims” four of whom were imprisoned for murdering their abusers, a fifth who was out on appeal, and a sixth who survived and represented the voice of reason (as she cited statistics) and righteousness (as she told her own tale of terror and demanded moral responsibility from the viewer).

Further, in the film, we saw presentations key to Gusfield’s criteria for issues becoming public: presentations of facticity (the problem exists) remediability (it can be “cured” or “fixed”) and moral responsibility (Buel’s cry, in *Defending Our Lives*:

> If you have not been victimized, if you have not been stalked, if you haven’t been stabbed, beaten, chased across state lines, tracked down, kidnapped, taken back, beaten again, feared for your life, you have truly been blessed. And this is an opportunity to thank God that you have been spared that. But I would argue it means you have a greater responsibility to try to empathize and understand with those of us who live with that, who don’t know what it is to sleep through an entire night because you jump at every noise, yes, fifteen years later...

*Defending Our Lives* won an Oscar in 1994 and is still used, in 2003, to illustrate the seriousness of the issue and the helplessness of victims in the face of systemic public failure to protect them. They tried to save themselves, but were unable to succeed. Their failure becomes our failure, and the failure of the social/judicial system.

*Additional Research Questions*

A second question concerned the balance between individual will and social culpability: *How do advocates in the battered women’s movement use narratives to negotiate the tension between individual agency and*
social responsibility? It may be seen to ask: who is to blame? Who must answer questions like: Why didn’t she just leave? Is it a societal failure, or individual responsibility?

This question is closely related to another: How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse, use narratives to resolve the issue of “invisibility” (a “voice without a face”; the non-rhetorical private vs. a life in public)? The same rhetorical move, personalizing the victim, accomplished both goals.

Attempts to present the women as “not mentally ill” and the issue as one of systemic social failure to protect the women contributed greatly to altering the view that women somehow “asked” for abuse, that it was an interpersonal relational dysfunction, that there was an “easy” answer: leave the jerk. What was required, and offered, was a more personal narrative of the victim, one that, in effect, normalized her and offered a presentation of her [good] reasons for returning to an undeniably abusive situation. Along the way, these “good reasons” also assisted in the expansion of the definition of abuse to include such things as emotional terror, financial abuse, isolation and verbal abuse.

This question is primarily answered by looking at vernacular, first person narratives presented in the text A Woman Like You, as the “pure victim” is replaced by a more personalized victim/survivor, one who can provide answers to hard questions, one who presents the argument that “I tried [to leave, to make the relationship work, to have a normal life, to protect
myself and my children] and I eventually succeeded, but of primary
importance is that you understand this situation happens to normal women, to
women just like you…and this is not an issue that can be walked away from”

The narratives in the book, and the pictures that accompany those
stories, assert many claims: they first present women and their
autobiographical tales of experiencing domestic violence. Second, the
presentation is of the women as profoundly normal. Thirdly, They are able to
reach across the boundaries of race/ethnicity, class, age, and sexuality. In
addition, they present compelling arguments, in everyday vernacular)
language, 5 that domestic abuse is not about “them” but about “us.” Finally
Their almost mundane tales of courtship, marriage, family resonate with the
reader.

What Defending Our Lives did for the face of victims in construing them as not mentally ill, A Woman Like You accomplishes in terms of holding a mirror to the audience and encouraging the realization that the face in the book is not significantly different from the face in the mirror: hopes, dreams, attempts to live a good life, love, pain, sorrow, regret. They are women, they are survivors, who have overcome the death of important relationships, they have faced hardship, they have overcome obstacles, and they have returned to say “I am like you. Hear my story, see my face. Know that I could be your sister, your mother, aunt, girlfriend, co-worker, boss, neighbor. The distance between us is so small, because my story could be your story. I am not ‘other’ --- I am, indeed, a woman like you…”
In Context

While Defending Our Lives did an admirable job of focusing attention on victims of the system, on facticity and remediability and moral obligation surrounding the issue, it presented another challenge. The documentary might be seen as an attempt to establish ownership of domestic abuse as an issue, to frame the topic in terms of a favored presentation of cause and assignment of responsibility. Moreover, this framing issued a clarion call to public action. Thus, the movie can be seen an example of early contestation and assertion of ownership, but it did not solve the problem.

Perhaps because the feminists, who were the early issue owners, attributed essential causality to patriarchy, and because issues of “power over” and “control” are seldom cured by legislation, the protections enacted through legislation, and the education facilitated by the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 did not “solve” or cure domestic violence. Indeed, it might be seen to have uncovered other problems that needed to be addressed.

For example, as previously stated, the original call was to legislation and legal sanctions to enforce social maledictions against battery, whether that battery took place in the corner bar or in the bedroom. While, in the scope of this dissertation, it seems as though feminists and advocates presented strong arguments, the arguments were accepted and voila --- domestic violence is illegal! the actual process was agonizing and contested and slow. That process involved years of litigation forcing police and courts to
take victims seriously; years of education concerning victim rights, recognition of symptoms of abuse, trial and error methods of prosecution.

While gains were made, women still died, indeed are dying as this paper is typed. Children witnessed abuse and re-enacted the cycles at school, at home, and in subsequent relationships. While legislation and enforcement were unarguably a step in the right direction, issue owners would certainly argue that it was not enough. Patriarchy, as causal, was not cured by legislation.

In a sense, domestic violence can be seen as a symptom of a more overriding cause, and while the symptom was, however slowly, being addressed, the “disease” was far from eliminated. If legislation is the prescription to cure the presenting symptom (battery) and incarceration or stiff sanctions the means of excising the visible sign (the batterer), there still remains the reality of the disease (gross injustice at the hands of a patriarchal society, directed towards women and children).

Moreover, or perhaps consequently, the issue remained distanced from the very publics that could be called to authorize real, broad, ideological societal change. The presentation of a pure victim did not succeed in making the issue personal. The women, while perhaps sane and suffering, remained “other”—not us, not from our neighborhood or social class or family or even circle of acquaintances.

While ownership was established, and domestic assault could be seen as a problem demanding remediation in the form of legal protection and
social/legal sanctions, it did not necessarily resonate individually as a problem of concern to me. Rather, as with victims of flooding in Bangladesh in the 70s, there remained a critical distance: Yes we should assist the victims. Of course, money should be given. Indeed, there is a sense of moral obligation, but when all is said and done, I can sleep well at night because I never met anyone from Bangladesh, and never saw anyone starve and really, I have my own life to live.

In terms of domestic violence, legislate, by all means, and enforce that legislation. But it really doesn’t have much to do with me or my life. Throw the bums in jail and let me go back to sleep...

**Personalizing the Face of the Victim**

Had grassroots feminists, advocates and survivors of domestic abuse – the loose coalition of “owners” of the issue – named the cause of domestic violence merely a societal failure to view wives and children as legitimate victims of a crime, and had they solely attributed political responsibility for remediation to the court system, this dissertation might not have been written because, like drinking and driving, the cause and responsibility would have been fixed, would have been reified into a form of the status quo, and there would be no more debate and agitation over the issue. Actually, when I started writing this dissertation, I would have wagered money that the issue was a similarly “done deal” --- early feminists did all the work, and now the job remained to patch the occasional hole in the dam.
But as we have seen in Hauser (1999) real political change – the way democracy *actually* works – involves changes in, by, and on behalf of publics who are called into being to address questions of importance. These localized, specialized and vernacular publics are fluid in their genesis and disbanding. They are called into being by rhetorical discourse; their purpose is to share understandings; they are of the substance of everyday encounters at work or at play. They are the enactment of civil society, invented and reinvented as issues change and demands for public action evolve. They form as *individuals* heed the call of moral responsibility to render judgment and authorize action.

When we look at the evolution of the face of domestic violence, we see the necessity for a personalized victim/survivor, the need for moral appeals to reach the individual citizen, in a form that can be recognized as vernacular discourse, and in a way that commands their engagement in changing the material social conditions of women and children. An example of that kind of appeal is present in the aforementioned book *A Woman Like You* (Anderson, 1997).

Had the foremothers of the battered woman’s movement limited remediation to personal identification, this dissertation narrative might, once again, have ended prematurely. After all, now I *know* about domestic violence, I *understand* that laws must be enforced, I *accept* that any woman could be a victim, I can *identify* with the reality and suffering of sane and
normal women, and I am willing to support attempts to protect women and children who are involved in situations of abuse. What more do you want?

**Still More Questions**

In part, that can be answered along with another research question, one which focuses on the unique placement of Boulder County Safehouse. The question asks: **How does an agency use narrative to negotiate the boundary between public and private: Safehouse as boundary-spanner.**

Closely related is another query: **How do feminist advocates, survivors of domestic violence and spokespersons for Safehouse, use narratives to help construct a personal "survivor" identity as a counter to a "victim" identity?**

When Boulder County Safehouse advocates “discovered” the book *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices* (Davies, 1998) it substantially affected the organizational view of victim vs survivor, a construction which posited that survivors = those who leave abusive relationships, and victims = those who return. The adoption of Davies text affected the way outreach workers presented the battered woman to the public, and at the same time, it changed the organizational response to the battered woman herself, realizing that previous views of the victim/survivor were a binary distortion of the complex and interwoven choices facing women in shelter.

Moreover, Safehouse’s unique boundary spanning and advocacy role allowed them to expand the definition of “survivor” to include women who
rationally choose to return to a relationship, which before would have labeled her "victim." Not only did this move increase the definition and presentation of survivor, it also increased the territory over which Safehouse could claim ownership, as we shall see.

**In Context**

Remember that Boulder County Safehouse, as an organization, serves as a bridge between the Shelter, where women and children flee from violence and pain in their "private" lives, and the Administrative building (the Outreach Center) where members of the organization go about the business of presenting public arguments on and about domestic (or, as they have more recently taken to calling it "interpersonal") violence. This bridge is a well-traveled one, as volunteers and paid staff can circulate freely between the physical buildings. Moreover, lessons learned in the Shelter (that all victims are not severely physically battered; that there are more choices than stay and be saved, or leave and die) are carried to the Outreach, and vice versa.

In a move that somehow seems a logical outgrowth of the "pure victim" to "personalized victim" movement, this adoption of a "complex life" position exponentially expanded the possibility of a "survivor" returning to a relationship. It posits a woman as sometimes *choosing rationally* and in her own — and/or her children’s — best interests, a return to an abusive situation. Women as victims had earlier been absolved of mental defect if they did not leave their abuser. Women who did leave, came back and illustrated to a public audience that --- as both victims and survivors --- they were and are
not substantially different from any woman: they possessed the same dreams and hopes and love and relationship desires: they were neither alien or substantially other, their stories were recognizable and acceptable. Now we see that survivors may chose to return to a relationship. The picture of victim, as helpless individual in the face of overwhelming social obstacles, has not substantially changed, but the potential identity of survivor has, indeed, been expanded.

A question still remained, and one which was not specifically articulated in the dissertation: If a woman can choose to return to an abusive relationship, and if that rational choice and agency moves her from "victim" to "survivor, but still suffering," has the very nature of the question of domestic violence changed?

The answer might have been made in the affirmative, had we not the benefit of Gusfield and Hauser. What those theorists tell us is that contestation for ownership still remains: remember that feminist advocates have, from the beginning, attributed cause to patriarchy, a stand from which they have not deviated. What these issue owners have done, however, is, by changing the rhetorical framing of victim/survivor, expanded the terrain over which they assert ownership. We can see them move from challenging patriarchy to framing the issue as one of "social justice;" laws and legislation can try to level the playing field, but demands for social justice include eviscerating the companions or daily manifestations of patriarchy: ethnicity and racism, able-ism, age-ism, heterosexism, classism.
Social Justice

Recall that, from the beginnings of the battered women’s movement, attribution of causal responsibility was affixed to patriarchy: the social system itself mirrors a flawed organizing principle – that men are somehow superior to women in a cosmic hierarchy. Laws and legislation and enforcement can attempt to *equalize* opportunities in employment and housing, they can command segregation and demand equal seating on the bus, but laws and legislation cannot cure racism. All the VAWA sponsored legislation and education cannot *cure* domestic violence, because the issue is bigger than men beating up on women.

Once the beating has stopped, once the perpetrator has been jailed, the experience is not magically “over” for women: they still cannot make the same money as a man (assuming, of course, that they have marketable skills); they are still the primary caregivers of minor children in a society that does not view daycare as essential and therefore affordable; they are single women/mothers in a world that valorizes intact nuclear families; divorce and separation may have alienated them from religious or cultural support; Safehouses offer only six weeks of shelter, and all the ongoing support in the world is not going to repair the rift in the family. The list goes on and, significantly, the problems just listed are experienced even more acutely when the woman is a person of color, or a “foreigner,” or physically challenged, or poor, or lesbian, or older.
The rhetorical actions of Safehouse activists illustrate an apparent change in the way domestic abuse is *framed*. No longer is it merely a matter of "providing safe shelter, support, and advocacy for battered women and their children" but rather "envisioning a future without violence." What a difference a few words make!!! While not to be seen as abrogating claims that patriarchy is the cause of a social system that allows vulnerable members to be demeaned and beaten, the target is now violence writ large and small. This is a matter of vital importance to everyone, it is a matter of *social justice*.

Thus, in the course of this dissertation, we have seen how feminists advocates, survivors of domestic violence, and spokespersons for Safehouse have used narrative to exert ownership claims, frame the issue, assign causal and political responsibility, and continue their efforts to maintain control/ownership over the face of domestic violence. We have seen the changing face of the victim/survivor. We have also found the theories of Gusfield and Hauser to admirably explain just how that issue ownership is created and maintained, in the light of multiple potential publics and against the backdrop of competing claims and calls for public involvement. In sum, the dissertation answered the questions posited and, in the best tradition of research, revealed and accounted for phenomenon not anticipated at the start of the project.
Limitations to the Study

While I present this work with pride and a subtle sense of surprise that it actually answered important questions, and might pave the way for more wonderful questions and answers, I must acknowledge some limitations. I purposely chose to keep the study on the level of available public narratives. I am proud of my three data sets, and frankly surprised at how well they worked together to add richness to an evolving portrait of domestic violence, but aware that some might question the size or selection of that set. I purposely attempted to select different media, different sources and different available public texts that made rhetorical presentations of domestic violence as an issue of social concern. I am satisfied that the quality and representative quality of the sample met those criteria.

I did not sample all public discourse on domestic violence. I make no claims to even have examined the best discourse. I did, however, meet the (self-imposed) requirement to analyze discourse readily available in the public realm, texts that could be acquired by members of the general public, and texts which attempted to present a [specific] view of domestic violence for public acceptance. As with almost all qualitative studies, the question of generalizability remains.

Also, a disclaimer must be made: while Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show a progression of rhetorical casting of the battered woman from pure victim to survivor, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to assert that Defending
Our Lives was specifically created to answer the claims of grassroots feminists. That it did answer those claims, and within the time frame of public arguments over the original Violence Against Women Act, is significant, but causal claims cannot be made. Similarly, the appearance of A Woman Like You could more accurately be called coincidental and, from my perspective, fortuitous, rather than as a response to some organized organizational imperative.

The only cause-and-response claims that can be made concern Boulder County Safehouse’s move to a discourse of social justice. There a clear correspondence can be seen between adoption of a text (Davies, 1998) and consequent reframing of important concepts: survivor, social justice, educational outreach.

Moreover, while the analysis has revealed Boulder County Safehouse’s attempt to move the discourse and assert ownership over “social justice”, time will be the best judge of whether that move was successful. I can provide documentation that the program is moving into its third year, and, from that, assume, in a time of country- and county-wide financial and budget crisis, no non-profit organization would continue to invest time and labor in an “unsuccessful” program. Whether Boulder County Safehouse will be able to become primarily identified as an owner of “social justice” is a study that the future can better answer.

Finally, a niggling question, a strong subtext, remains unaddressed and unanswered: where is the voice of the victim? I sought to find her voice,
and while I have heard the stories of survivors, of former victims, and have seen one-dimensional presentations of letters from “Sue” or some other alias, I fear that the victim remains silenced.

**Implications**

Theoretically this dissertation serves to validate the application of both Gusfield and Hauser as appropriate and useful lenses through which we can view issue ownership, and ownership appeals to publics formation. Gusfield provides researchers a vocabulary for addressing how an issue is brought into the public view, how ownership is contested, the criteria that must be met for a problem to be perceived as public, and the benefits of ownership.

Hauser’s contribution is to illustrate how that ownership is exercised rhetorically, practically, empirically, day to day, as an organization -- or “owner” -- issues morally imperative calls to potential publics, urging them to authorize action leading to the resolution of perceived exigencies. While Gusfield seems to assert that once an issue becomes a public problem it so controls public perception that the issue becomes reified and dictates perceptions of reality, Hauser allows for the flexibility of issue evolution.

We can see that the appeals change as owners respond to changing social reality: when challenges were made to the grassroots perception of “victims” a narrative appeared that framed the women as victims of social failures, rather than interpersonal ones. When the public face of the victim remained distanced, and moral imperatives to action required a personalized victim, faces and narratives became available that posited and presented the
women as “like” rather than “other.” And while legislation has been enacted to protect and serve victims of domestic abuse, larger questions of social justice have allowed Boulder County Safehouse to extend ownership claims beyond “mere” battery.

As a sideline, the use of Gladys Murphy Graham’s “Natural Procedure of Argument” (1925) enhances an appreciation of the methods used in narrative persuasion. While there is no attempt made to preempt Fisher’s narrative paradigm, Graham, like Hauser, shows practically and impressively, how persuasion takes place.

Methodologically, narrative analysis allows for the discovery of common themes present in stories offered for public consumption as persuasive texts. Those common themes lead to framing victims and survivors in specific ways, ways which can be seen to change across time.

Finally, the theories and methodology chosen have allowed me to “map” or “track” the evolving face of domestic violence as it is framed, and reframed as a social problem deserving of public action and remediation. It has allowed analysis of an organization’s attempt to exert ownership over a still-contested terrain and reveals that there is no resting on laurels for agencies committed to social change. The process does not end, but the journey to enact solutions to social problems is a fascinating rhetorical accomplishment.

Future Studies

I remain frustrated by the lack of victims’ face and voice in public. I was so sure that somehow “her” story could make it into forums where “she”
could be heard. And, in some ways, it does, but so often it is a post-mortem account, or a third person narrative. I believe there is a need to ask questions about why we have no room for her voice. Is it because we do not have a language for pain? Reality television would seem to deny that. Is it because we do not have time, as a society, for "losers" and victims must somehow be "losers?" Perhaps, but loss and tragedy are not unfamiliar themes in public venues. Is is because the victims are women, and their reality not as important in a capitalistic and profit driven society? Perhaps.

Or perhaps it is because victims of domestic violence are, as Foucault might tell us, the "sick other" against which we define our health(ier) selves. Perhaps we need their silent suffering to measure our own relative success. It somehow, to me, seems like a dirty little secret that begs further examination. Their silent presence is a ghost that should haunt. Like a black hole, it challenges and terrifies at the same time.
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APPENDIX A

Domestic Violence Related Websites
Updated 8/1/03

www.abanet.org/domviol/home.html
  • American Bar Association Coalition on Domestic Violence

www.biscmi.org/ the Batterer Intervention Services Coalition of Michigan
BISCMI Mission Statement
  • We will provide a working forum for interaction and information sharing among agencies and individuals concerned with the provision of batterer intervention services in Michigan.
  • We will create and maintain coordinated community actions that hold batterers accountable for their behavior and promote safety and empowerment for victims/survivors.
  • We will keep the needs of victims/survivors foremost in our efforts rather than the interests of batterers or any batterer intervention service or model.

www.centerwomenpolicy.org
  • Founded in 1972, the nation's first feminist policy research organization.

www.dvmen.org
  • Domestic Violence Against Men in Colorado.

http://endabuse.org/
  • the Family Violence Prevention Fund

www.fathersforlife.org
  • the latest news:angryharry.com

www.feminist.org
  • The Feminist Majority Foundation Online

www.mesacanada.com/dmvio.htm
  • Men's Educational Support Association  *Preserving the integrity of fatherhood for the sake of the children.* out of Canada
• "The fact that politicians continue to operate on the false assumption that women are the feeble victims of male oppression is beyond belief"
  – Gwen Landolt, REAL Women

www.ncadv.org/
  • National coalition against domestic violence: *Every home a safe home*

www.ncjrs.org:
  • National Criminal Justice Reference Service

www.ndhvh.org/
  • National Domestic Violence Hotline

www.now.org/issues/violence
  • National Organization for Women

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo
  • Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/statistics.htm
  • Department of Justice Research and Statistical Publications

www.vaw.umn.edu/library/dv/
  • Violence against women online resources (WAVOR)
  • "This website is supported by grant number 98-WT-VX-K001 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.
  • This website is a cooperative project of the Office on Violence Against Women and Minnesota Center Against Violence & Abuse at the University of Minnesota

http://womhist.binghamton.edu/
  • Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1775-2000
    - Co-published by the Center for the Historical Study of Women and Gender at SUNY Binghamton and Alexander Street Press.
  • Related sites
    • http://womhist.binghamton.edu/vawa/intro.htm
    • womhist.Binghamton.edu/vawa/prologue.htm
APPENDIX B:
ROUGH TRANSCRIPT OF DEFENDING OUR LIVES

Documentary opens with black and white pictures of domestic violence victims; Buel's voiceover:

Sarah Buel's voice:

They are punched, kicked, they are beaten while trying to hold on to their babies.
They are strangled, choked, burned with cigarettes; doused with kerosene and lighter fluid and set on fire.
They are run over by cars and trucks, they have their teeth knocked out with hammers, they are raped with hot curling irons and large objects; they are stabbed with everything from knives to ice picks to screwdrivers — anything that penetrates.
They are forced to watch the torture of their family members; their children are forced to watch their assault and torture, and they're often tied up and forced to watch the torture and molestation of their own children.

*Am I describing atrocities committed in some foreign country? By soldiers in a country at war?
Am I describing atrocities about which Amnesty International and other human rights organizations are writing to you and pleading for money? I'm describing domestic violence as it occurs in America.
Yes, there is a war against women and children in this country.

*TEXT: "SARAH BUEL, Assistant District Attorney, Suffolk county Domestic Violence Unit"


1:38 Meekah Scott

First: January 7th Lana Gilbert, 45 years old, of Summerville, Mass., was slain by her boyfriend of 15 years.
Then again, on February 13, Regina McGee 20, was fatally shot, allegedly by her boyfriend, Joseph Smith, 23, in the Dorchester home of Smith's mother. Smith was paroled from prison last year.
Then again, February 17, Betty Surreck, 29 years old, of Lang, was stabbed to death. Her boyfriend, Joseph Hoover, 36 of Haverhill, has been charged for her murder.
Then again, March 21, Julie Harlow, 22, of Whitman, died of a gunshot wound to the chest, arms and legs.
Again, on April 19, Maryanne Mortel of Springfield, was stabbed to death. Her husband, Michael Montel [sic], is scheduled to be tried for the murder on December 6th.
Again, May 1, Cynthia Reed, 22, of Peabody, was found dead, stabbed more than 40 times, in the front seat of her car at Logan Airport. Her former boyfriend, Wayne, 22, has been charged with her murder.

3:12 Patty Hennessy [on meeting Brian]

I met Brian when I was 11 years old. We started dating when I was 16, and when I was 18 we got married.
While we were dating everything was fine, he was sweet, he was kind -- everything I thought I wanted a man to be, someone I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.
After we got married, everything changed. He became a completely different person, and for 10 long years he abused me. Sexually physically emotionally.

3:49 Shannon Booker [meeting Jose]

My batterer's name was Jose. I met him in 1987, and as our relationship started out it was nice, you know, he sported [sic] with me, escorted me with nice pretty cars and jewelry and clothes, buying gifts for my daughter and everything.
For about 6 months the relationship was fine until one day, we was at the Gallery, which is a club in Boston, came home from the Gallery and that's when the abuse started. He socked me in my face, I had a black eye, and from that day the abuse became-- frantic.

4:37 Eugenia Moore [relationship with Alfred]

I met Alfred one day, I was working with the Mass Bay transportation authority in Massachusetts. I was driving – it's a bus route that you drive
throughout the local cities. I wanted to try to do something in my life and when I got the job life was good, but it was very strenuous job. When I met him it was just like the answer. He was polite, he opened doors for me, he catered to me, he waited on me, it was just so sweet. I knew that it was a lot of put-on, too because we had just gotten together.

5:12  **Lisa Grimshaw  [relationship with Tommy]**

With Tommy, it was fine at the beginning, and then he started being obsessive and jealous, and then accusing me. I was trying to work two jobs, and I was working two jobs, he was going to school. He would say “you’re going to work to look good for somebody else” that’s what he would accuse me of. And one time he – I was standing in front of the bed and he threw me down on the bed and started ripping my uniform off me, and slapping me in the face. And as he was tearing my uniform off he had started to rape me and I didn’t want to have sex with him and he was just taking it. And uh he turned me over and sodomized me. After he got done with me I really couldn’t move.

I can remember laying there and asking him what just happened, and uh he said that’s probably what I asked for. That would happen numerous times with Tommy. He did that a lot to me.

6:28  **Sarah Buel  [admits being former battered woman, 15 years ago]**.

It has been fifteen years now since I found myself a battered woman on welfare, at a time when there were no abuse prevention laws, no shelters, DAs, judges, police that I could find that were at all concerned about my safety, the safety of my then-infant son and the two foster children I had.

Well, we’ve come a little ways in 15 years. There are now 1200 battered women’s shelters across this country. But you need to keep that in perspective: there are about 3800 animal protection shelters. No matter how much you love animals it seems to me our priorities are a little skewed when we have three times the number of shelters for homeless animals then we have for battered women and their children.

The Center for Disease Control has even come to understand, through their Violence Epidemiology Unit, that more women now seek treatment in our nation’s emergency rooms as a result of domestic violence injuries than from the combination of muggings, rapes and car accidents.

That domestic violence constitutes the number one cause of injury to women in America.

They also tell us that women are in nine times more danger in their own home than they are in the street.
Now I don’t know about you, but when I was growing up in New York City I was always told not to go to certain areas late at night, to always be with one of my brothers or sisters or cousins if we were going to be near the park: all those stranger men who jump out from the bushes are going to get you. But none of those were the people who harmed me. But nobody said to me “you need to be careful who you marry. You need to be careful who you bring home to you.” And we don’t say that to our daughters, our sisters, our mothers, our brothers, our fathers our cousins – even now.

We engage in an extraordinary level of denial about the extent of family violence as it occurs in Massachusetts and across this country. The FBI tells us one out of every two women will be in a violent relationship in their lifetime. Not because 50% of all men are batterers, but because we as their community and society, completely fail to hold them accountable. They are free to move on to the next victim.

8:38  **Meekah**

May 28 Sandra Clinton, 21 years old, of Springfield, was strangled while her two children watched. Her former boyfriend, Frederick Murphy, 27, has been charged with the murder. The police say Murphy had attempted to strangle another former girlfriend the same day.

9:04  **Shannon** [lists abuses and why she didn’t turn Jose in].

Jose used to punch me. He would stomp me, drag me, drag me to the point where the meat in my knees was dug out of my kneecaps. He would beat me with billy-clubs, any type of object that he could put his hands on he would beat me with.

And it didn’t matter where it was, he would beat me, so I never thought of turning him in because from my background, I come from an abusive background I’ve always thought it was OK for me to accept this type of abuse, you know, as a child.

9:40  **Patty Hennessy**: [abuses while pregnant; why women stay].

When I told him I was pregnant he punched me in the stomach, started slapping me, shoving me up against the wall, telling me he didn’t want this responsibility, how could I do this to him.

He just became very violent all the time. Slapping me, pushing me calling me names.

I didn’t know what was wrong. I didn’t know what I was doing wrong. Now I realize that, at that time you feel like it’s you, something you’re
doing to provoke his behavior, so you try to do everything right um but nothing seems to work. It just doesn't change the way they are. You end up staying because you really want to believe that the person you love loves you back. Every person, human being needs to believe that they're loved and needed and because you hate what they're doing, it doesn't mean you hate them. And you believe they'll change. When they're crying and telling you that "I love you. I need you. I can't live without you." I'm a human being, my heart goes out to that person, if they're sin[cere]...I believe that they're really sorry. I'd cry with him.

11: 09: Eugenia Moore [examples of terrorism at work]

And one day when I didn’t expect [suspect?] him we had been arguing, he had fought me in the street just prior to that the day before, he would take and he showed up at the train station one day and it was no surprise because he was popping up everywhere and I didn’t realize at the time he was tracking me, so when he showed up and says “well can I go to work with you?” and I said “no look at what you just did to me this morning, look at what you did to me last night. All this violence everywhere we go and making a big scene everywhere we go.” Lookit I thought it was ‘we’ I now know it was not ‘we’ -- it was him. And I said “no you’re not riding up there in the park with me because I know you aren’t here to ride the bus, you’re here to terrorize me and to show me you can do this because this is public transportation.” So I said told him “no you can’t ride” so he stood over me, boxed me in the corner I had no where to go, I’m in the corner of the bus, you know, driving and he blocked me up in there “yes, I’m riding this bus” so I said “no you’re not” because I know we had been arguing for two or three trips, him standing’ over me, cussing and swearing I’m trying to tell him “look I talk to you later” “no no you got to agree that I’m goin home with you, can I ride with you?” I said “no you can’t ride with me look how you acting if you really wanted to ride with me you would be calm, leave and then call me later.”

12:17: Lisa Grimshaw [descriptions of rape and being tied up. Pregnancy and beatings].

He would use objects on me, inside me. He left me tied up on the bed for hours leaving me there. I got pregnant with Chad, he would hit me but I wouldn’t, I just wouldn’t let him hit me in the stomach. I really would try not to let him hit me anywhere near the baby. So at different times there were a couple of teeth knocked out from punches. One time, I think I was about 6 months pregnant, and he threw
me down on the bed we had been arguing and he said he was going to cut the baby out of my stomach because he just wanted to do it. And I really felt he was going to do this to the baby, and I was very scared.

13:20 Meekah

This list is so long, you know. On July 15th, Genevieve Adderson, 39, of Rosendale, died two days after she was beaten. She was beat to death. Her boyfriend, Gene, 42, is charged with her murder. July 20th, Theresa Cole, 20 years old, of Danvers, was stabbed to death, with a steak knife, while her two year old son watched. Her boyfriend, 36 years old, he’s charged with her murder.

14:07 Patty Hennessy [violence escalates; the way she felt; leaving Brian]

Right after I gave birth, it was a boy. Brian just thought he was too cool, you know “I had a son. I have a son, I have a son now.” And I felt, I was never so happy in my life. The kid was my life. He was everything to me. Brian never took care of him, he never bought a t-shirt for the kid, he never bought him a diaper, he never paid any attention to him. When he did pay any attention to him he would just hit him in the head, he used to like to hit him in the head all the time and I would go off the deep end.. At that point my attitude was: Do whatever you want to me, but don’t touch my kid, my kid meant everything to me. So the night I left, that was a lot with it. I know I should have been caring about my own life but I didn’t, at that point I didn’t. They get you to the point where you feel like you’re not worth anything and you don’t even deserve to live, but the love for my son made me want to live and made me want him to live and that’s why I left, for his sake more than mine.
[15:26] I was going to leave and run to my mother’s, my mother lived like three streets away, so I wrapped Timmy up in blankets and Brian came into the room and knocked Timmy out of my hands and Timmy bounced in the crib and he put a cigarette butt out on my neck and started pulling my hair and spitting on me, started kicking me. And I somehow managed to grab Timmy and run out of the house. And I was running to my mother’s and um he hopped in his van and he started chasing me down. And I went to cut across a lawn and there was trees there and there was a fence that I didn’t know was there prior to that so I was stuck up against the fence. And he took the van and he just floored it and he came right towards me and I just leaned up against the fence with Timmy in my arms and I thought I was dead, I thought
that was it, I was going to die: this is it he’s finally gonna kill me like he says he’s gonna. And he got stuck on a stump-- he kept backing up and going forward backing up and going forward and finally he was really stuck. So I just gathered myself together and I ran, kept running to my mother’s house, and I finally got up the driveway and he was right behind me. And I got in the house and I shut the door and I just slid down the door and my mother was in the standing in the kitchen and she started screaming. I guess there was blood all over the wall – all over the door, I had blood all over my face from goin through the bushes and stuff and him hitting me. I never went back after that. That was the last night. When it came to he almost killed my son, too, I just couldn’t deal with that.

[17:17] For the next seven years it was a constant everyday struggle to keep him away from me.

17:25: **Sarah Buel**  [statistics; the story of her attempts to leave].

A Texas study recently showed that 75% of the women currently in shelters had left at least several times previously.

[17:35] It is a myth that we do not leave. We generally leave many times before we are finally able to leave and stay away. At first when I left I went back it was because he said he was sorry. It would never happen again. And then it was because I would leave, the first time after that I left I got a job in a shoe factory, but by the time you’ve paid your rent and daycare, there’s no money to eat. You probably can’t even pay your rent. So you go back because you decide that it’s more important to feed your children. That you will figure out magically how to stop that abuse.

[18:08] When I talk about fear, one of the stories that I will share with you that I hope I will never forget is having left New York, gone to a small rural town in New Hampshire where I thought I would be safe, I was in a laundromat on a Saturday morning, my son was playing around, there were people over by the cash registers and my husband walked in the door. And I yelled over for the people to call the police. But he said “No this is my wife. We’ve just had a little fight. Nobody needs to do anything.” And I still had bruises on the side of my face. I said “No this is the person who beat me up. You need to call the police.” But he said “No this is my wife. We’ve just had a little fight. I’ve come to pick her up and take her home.” So nobody moved. And I thought as long as I live I want to remember what it feels like to be terrified for my life and nobody could even pick up the phone.”

Do you know how many battered women tell me about assaults in front of their building, out in public, or in apartments with thin walls, or in
summer with the windows and doors open? And nobody can be bothered to call the police.

19:17 Shannon [details of beating. Isolation.]

The beatings became worse. He would throw me down the stairs, stomp on me with his foot. He would beat me up in front of his friends to impress his friends.
It got to the point where he started isolating me. He wanted to know my whereabouts and a lot of the time he didn't want me to go nowhere unless he was there.
And um the violence, the beatings they were very dramatic. It was to the point where I was hospitalized several times.

19:55 Lisa [Tommy's abuse; police lack of response]

This continued for years. And um he kidnapped Chad, many times, took him to his mother's house.
When I tried to kick him out, at different points I'd tell him I had restraining orders. One time I had a restraining order against him and he was living with his mother but he would be at my house all the time for hours, trying to get in the door. And it was in the middle of summer and I was hammering the windows closed and he told me that-- I had called the police for them to come and they never came. It was one of those times because they just got real used to me calling they never bothered coming anymore so instead they're not coming so I just was hammering my windows closed because I thought he was going to come in the door and he did, he busted through the door.
He came through and took the hammer off of the table because I ran, and he started hitting me with it. There were some teeth knocked out, I was hit in the back, I was hit in the--- I don't really remember where I was hit but there was blood everywhere. His friend was there and I'm lucky that his friend was there because if he wasn't, he would have killed me that night there was no doubt in my mind I would not be here.
And the police came. There was charges brought against him: assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, attempted murder, B&E in the daytime many charges which nothing happened with.

21:42 Eugenia Moore [police failure to respond]

When I told him that he couldn't ride, all of a sudden he was standing over me, looking down, talking and he spit in my face. And I took and I wiped, and I said "look what you doing --why are you always doing this to me?"
And so after this I wiped that off, I got ready to stand up because he was hitting me again, and that's when I tried to grab him. I tried to grab him and bring him to me, that's when he took and he punched me in my stomach. I mean there was like five or six of us trying to hold him: he was wild, all over the place, throwing blows at people: they were ducking they couldn't hold him.

So the police came I said "Arrest him! Arrest him! he just attacked me" I was in hysterics. The guy says "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. He says he's your boyfriend" I said "My boyfriend? what that has to do with it? The man just attacked me." I said "what does that have to do with it?" "Um well we didn't see anything."

They didn't see anything? They're the police. There was witnesses who held him there, there was the bystanders.

"No" they told me "you have to go down and get a restraining order" sometime this was like 4:30 in the afternoon, "tomorrow morning you have to go out and get a restraining order."

I said "restraining order? Arrest him. I'm an employee. You're supposed to protect me. Arrest him." "No" he said. "Listen to me: calm down."

In the meantime Alfred is standing back jumping [sic] around, laughing---it was a big joke to him.

I couldn't believe what was happening, I was so embarrassed, I was so ashamed. This was on my job. This had happened on the streets before and people had intervened, but this was on the job I didn't know if I was going to get fired or what...

23:10  Patty Hennessy  [police failure to respond and consequences]

Right before I did leave him one time he had beat me so bad I had a broken nose, a fractured nose. I called the police.

The police came, and he was standing in the doorway and I was in the driveway covered in blood and I said "I want him arrested" and they says "well we didn't see him do it, we can't arrest him."

And I'm like "well what, do you think I did this to myself?" And he was laughing. After the police left I got a worse beating.

They get, it makes them worse when the cops show up and they tell you we can't help you. Then they get mad: "Oh, you gonna call the police on me? Oh, OK fine, I'll kill you now..."

23:43:  Meekah  [crying]

Barbie, 45 years old, of Cambridge, was stabbed to death outside of her apartment she shared with her husband.

Oct 26th, Bernadette, 29, of Medford, died after being stabbed in the back six times and beaten on the head.
24:25 Shannon [Jose’s murder]

We got into a fight. I managed to get away from him and I called him like about half an hour later to see was he at his mother’s house. I called him from a friend’s house because it was like two in the morning and I couldn’t call my grandmother, you know.

So um I called him and I asked him, I said to him, I said “Jose why do you put me through these changes? You claim to love me and everything but yet you beat on me. You stomp on me with your foot. You punch me in my face. Do you really like walking down the street with me with black eyes and with my body being black and blue?”

And he said to me “Shannon, just come on home. You know I’m sorry. I love you and everything”

So I went back to the house, and as I entered the door he punched me in my face full force, and said “Bitch, I got you.”

And I ran upstairs and I started packing my stuff and he came upstairs and me and him started tussling and arguing and stuff and I told him, I said “just let me pack my stuff I’m gonna leave and I won’t come back.”

And he told me he said “Bitch, before you leave, I’ll kill you.”

Now he had threatened me several times. He has put guns in my mouth, guns to my head, and played like Russian roulette with me, putting the gun in my mouth and clicking the trigger and stuff.

And anytime he told me that he was going to kill me I believed him to a certain extent, but this night it was more fearful than ever. You know the expression on his face was like a real cold expression.

And um he had threatened to kill me so he went downstairs and came back upstairs with a 357 Magnum that was his, and he had um threatened me with the gun and I was laying on the bed you know, crying and everything, and then he put the gun in the drawer, he walked out the room and went back downstairs.

And I took the gun out and I placed it under the bed. My intentions was just to keep the gun from him.

But when he came back upstairs we started tussling and fighting and I pulled the gun out and I shot him.

And with the first shot that I shot him with he said “Bitch, you shot me in my head, I’m goin to kill you” [long pause]

26:50 Lisa Grimshaw [the murder of Tommy]

He ended up coming to the house, more and more every day, trying to get into the apartment. And my mother was living with me at the time and I was still working, bartending.

And I met these guys at work and they would see Tommy come in and terrorize me and they would say “You want us – you know, playing macho men – you want us to take care of this for you? You want us...”
and I would be like "well you can just tell him to leave me alone if you want."
And they were like "That's it Lisa, let's go get him let's go do something let's go beat him up."
Actually, you know, I don't know what I was thinking, OK? He was at work, I went and got him from work, brought him in the car. My son was home. Two guys were with me. I rode him to a place. He thought that he was going to have his way with me and have sex and that wasn't going to happen. But I left him.
I rode him to the woods, the other guys were there. I brought him to the woods, I turned around. The guy swung the bat and right when he jumped out of the woods I ran back to the car.
They came back to the car and one of the guys said that "why did you keep hitting him?" the other guy said "I don't know. I just did."

28:12: **Eugenia Moore** [Alfred's murder]

He didn't care. The only thing he cared about and told me about from January of 85 until June of 85 was that he was gonna kill me, he was gonna *kill* me, he was gonna *kill* me.
The only thing I can envision was him and his 007 knife. It's a street name for a big butcher knife like switchblade that he carried, I know he carried it. I know that he felt that I had hurt him and that he wanted me to be hurting back like him.
I left Forest Hills Station I went home and I watched a video and I said "no, I'm gonna leave" and on my way out the door I went into the kitchen and I picked up a knife out of my kitchen drawer and I put it in my pocket.
When I went to the store I came out the store, I took and realized there wasn't anybody around there that I knew. I knew I wouldn't know anyone. So I opened my door of the back seat, and I put the umbrella in, I laid it on the floor, it was wet, and I put the bag on the back seat of my car and I felt, half of my body was in the car, and I felt Alfred, which it was Alfred, hit me on the bottom part of my back. And I said "Lord he done found me."
I turned around and backed up out of the car, and that's when I turned around and I saw him. "Uhuh bitch, I done caught you. See you didn't think I know where you'd be at, huh? I know everywhere you goin be bitch, I'm gonna kill you."
And the next thing I remember it happened in two seconds. He hit me, I hit him back, my next hand went to reach for my pocket, I took the knife out and I know now that, which I had blocked it out, that I stabbed him twice, they say, in his chest.

29:14 **Patty Hennessy** [Brian's murder]
Brian's attitude was "well if I can't have you and Timmy then you're not gonna have Timmy. If I can't have Timmy, no one's gonna have Timmy." Brian somehow got a court order, another judge to say that he could take Timmy to Florida. Brian told me that I'd never see Timmy again. He told me that he'd kill me if I didn't give him Timmy. I was afraid for my life and for Tim's life.

Brian showed up early. He came up the steps and he was laughin. He said "You better kiss Timmy goodbye, because you're never gonna see him again."

And I went in the house and I just started freakin out. I didn't know what to do. I knew if I came back outside and told him "No, Tim's not here, you're not getting him" he would kill me.

I knew he was going to kill me that day. I mean, he had told me so. It was like the final frontier. This was it. There was nowhere else for it to go. It was me or him.

And my father was a policeman. He had guns in the house all my life. And I never thought -- ever -- of using any of those guns at any time except now. I knew my life was on the line here. So I went in the house and I grabbed a, I went in the cabinet and I grabbed my father's gun because I didn't know what else to do.

I had called the police, I had done everything in my power to leave this man and to get the police to help me and they wouldn't. So I had to protect myself. It was me or him.

I guess I didn't know if I even wanted to live up until that moment. Whether I should kill myself-- I didn't know. So I grabbed the gun and I went out on the porch and he just stood there and he looked at me and I shot the gun.

He came after me. He like stepped back and he stepped forward and I was pinned up against the screen door and he was trying to grab the gun out of my hand so I shot him again and he just stood there.

So I shot him again and he still just stood there and it was like-- I don't know-- like he was this-- I don't know unbeatable thing.

It was horrible, I mean I felt his life go right through mine. It was like time was standing still for that moment and nothing was gonna change what was gonna happen. It was like fate or something. It was really heavy and um I ran in the house and I locked the door I thought he was gonna get up and come after me.

32:58 Sarah Buel [unfair sentencing for victims who kill]

The New York Legal Aid Society documented, in their study of New York state, that battered women who kill are mistreated at every juncture in the criminal justice system: they have higher initial bails set, they are detained longer, and ultimately have higher sentences than any other kind of defendant, including serial rapists and murderers.
This is nothing short of misogyny. This is nothing short of a criminal justice system that is dealing very differently with women as defendants, and in particular battered women as defendants, than any other kind of defendant.

33:41 Eugenia Moore [verdict and sentence]

My trial was for February the third to the sixth, I believe. I think I had four days of trial.
My attorney, um, he introduced the battered women's syndrome. But they wouldn't allow it into the courtroom. The judge heard it and asked him "What was this? Who says so? Where did you get this thing from, battered women's syndrome?"
So the jury was dismissed and we went through like two or three hours of expert testimony. When the jury came back the trial resumed without the expert testimony, and on that they saw that I did stab Alfred Phillips, so therefore it was murder.
I was charged with second degree murder and was given a life sentence at 27 years old.

34:23 Patty [sentence]

I pled guilty to manslaughter. I got a 18 to 20 year sentence, which I'm serving now. I've served three and a half years of it.
Um Brian's parents ended up with my son, even though my family raised him for the first seven years of his life..

34:50 Lisa [sentence and imprisonment]

I was arrested for first degree murder. And then I went to ATU, awaiting trial.
It was a unit with this long hallway. There was 21 rooms. I was in room 201. They brought me there in the middle of the night. And I spent three and a half years up there, in that one hallway, in that one room. I was locked 22 hours a day, awaiting trial.
I spent many hours crying, wondering what was going to happen to me, facing life in prison.
And I don't know how I did those three and a half years up there. I mean, it was a prisoner of war camp, so to speak, locked up in this 8 x 15 room.
But my life, it was, I wasn't afraid anymore. I wasn't afraid of dying. I knew Tommy wasn't going to kill me. I went to trial three years later. They gave me 15 to 20 years for manslaughter.
35:57 Shannon [arrest and sentencing]

They took me down to the police station, I was charged with murder one.
And in the police station, nobody never asked me how I was: I was bruised very badly, Jose had beat me so badly that the muscles in my knees were moving. You could see the muscles flexing in my kneecap. My head was busted open.
When I took Jose's life, a part of me was taken too. But I had to defend my life. It was either me or him, and that night I felt it was going to be me.
You know I um I've been tortured all my life but being with Jose was the worst, and I just couldn't take any more.
And here I sit in prison, serving eight to fifteen years.
I'm the victim, I've been victimized by Jose and now I'm being victimized by the system.

37:10 Sarah Buel [indictment of system; call to action]

The very DA's offices who somehow do not have the time, money, resources, people to help battered women when we come in as the plaintiffs in these actions or as witnesses in criminal cases, somehow have all the prosecutors, all the police investigators, they can possibly need when we are the defendants.
We need to do a little more of the up-front work, we need to demand that of our police, our district attorney's offices and certainly parole, probation, anybody that has contact and works with battered women.

37:43 Patty [hopes for women]

I just hope that no other woman has to defend her life like I had to. If anybody learns anything from me telling my story I hope it's that, that You do have rights, and demand them, because they HAVE to protect you.
The police should have protected me, the courts should have protected me and they didn't, and here I sit and it shouldn't have to happen...
38:08 If a stranger had been doing this to me, they would have helped me. But because it was my husband and my ex-husband they won't help me and I don't understand it. I don't understand....
38:23 **Eugenia** [on innocence]

I didn’t murder no one...he came to murder me, it just so happened I put the final blow to him instead of him putting the final blow to me....

38:32 **Lisa** [it didn’t have to be]

The whole situation with this, it didn’t have to be. There didn’t have to be a death, and there didn’t have to be ME in prison, And my son didn’t have to lose his mother for how many years, and he doesn’t know me anymore...

38:47 It didn’t have to be this way.

38:47 **Shannon** [telling my story]

But I’m grateful to be alive. I thank God for letting me sit here, telling my story.

39:04 **Sarah Buel**: [moral imperative]

If you have not been victimized, if you have not been stalked, if you haven’t been stabbed, beaten, chased across state lines, tracked down, kidnapped, taken back, beaten again, feared for your life, you have truly been blessed. And this is an opportunity to thank God that you have been spared that. But I would argue it means you have a greater responsibility to try to empathize and understand with those of us who live with that, who don’t know what it is to sleep through an entire night because you jump at every noise, yes, fifteen years later.

39:40 **Meekah**

Again, Oct 26th, Angeline, 55 years old, was shot to death. And Kathleen, on November 11th, 35, and her son, Marcus, 8, were strangled to death, and stuffed in a closet.

[40:06] 20 women in 11 months. It’s crazy. I could have been one of these statistics...but I fought back.
Text: Mekah Scott was sentenced to 8 – 12 years for killing her batterer. She is currently out on appeal.

40: 40 Text: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

40:48 Text: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

40:54 Text: No one shall be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

41:00 Text: Universal Declaration of Human Rights as adopted by the United Nations in 1948: Articles 1, 3 and 5.

Movie ends with silence and opening picture. Credits roll.
Looking back, she remembers thinking his possessiveness was romantic. [2]

Joining a women’s support group has helped her restore her self-esteem. [3]

She had hoped her professional success would make her husband proud of her. [4]

When she was growing up in Japan, girls were encouraged to marry young and be obedient wives. [5]

Like most young wives in the 1950s, her dream was to make a nice home for her family. [6]

She was convicted of manslaughter for the death of her abusive husband. [7]

After she left him, she co-founded a battered women’s shelter in an inner-city neighborhood. [8]

She finally realized that trying harder to please him wouldn’t change his behavior. [9]

She knew her decision to leave would mean financial hardship. [10]

Her first step to a new life was breaking the silence about the abuse. [11]

She was acquitted in 1983 after killing her abusive husband in self-defense. [12]

She is serving 16 years to life in prison for killing her husband while he was battering her. [13]

She thought that battering only happened in heterosexual relationships. [14]

Now divorced she still has to see him at their son’s soccer games. [15]

After turning down a plea bargain, sure she would never be convicted for self-defense, she was sentenced to 17 years to life in prison. [16]

Granted a lifetime restraining order, she is building a new life for herself and her children. [17]
She and her grown children have a loving and supportive relationship with her second husband. [18]

She is currently serving a sentence of seventeen years to life for killing her batterer. [19]

She didn't think things like this happened in Jewish families. [20]

Their mother is serving a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole for the death of their father. [20ab]

After her divorce, counseling helped her regain her confidence. [21]

She was granted clemency by the governor of Iowa after serving sixteen years in prison. [22]

She still believes there are many good men out there who are capable of having healthy, loving relationships. [23]

She continues to advocate for deaf and disabled women. [24]

When her father disapproved of her decision to leave her husband, she found support elsewhere. [25]

It still helps her to share her story with other women in a group. [26]

After her divorce became final, she changed her name and took a job in another state. [27]

Nine years old, he worries about his toddler brother. [28]

Even though she now feels safe, she still lives with a security building with no name on the mailbox. [29]

She is now serving 27 years to life in prison for killing her abuser. [30]

Not wanting to live the rest of her life in fear, she changed her name and moved out of the country. [31]

Marion died in prison in 1993. [32]

Recently married, her husband is patient and supportive with her lingering fears. [33]
After serving 10 years for killing her husband, she was released from prison in March, 1997, becoming the first woman in California to be granted clemency based on battered woman's syndrome. She is now building a new life with her children and continues to be an outspoken advocate on behalf of other abused women. [34]