Domestic Abuse in Families: A Feminist Perspective

by

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Abstract

Domestic abuse refers to a pattern of coercive control that can be used over a victim to maintain power and dominance. It does not always include physical violence. Violence can be emotional, financial, or consist of threats. The successful abuser adapts to use strategies that could be acceptable in society if isolated into one event. This capstone focuses on how to help families with children where patterns of coercive control dominate. The parents might be separated or not. Most of this type of abuse where coercive control exists is in heteronormative relationships where the man is the abuser, and the woman is the victim. This cultural "effect" has devastated the lives of millions of women and children. When we recognize how gendered odds originate from our culture, we gain an opportunity to understand our culture better, to avoid pathologizing victims, and to have a roadmap to healing. Our service providers: counselors, law enforcement, banks, and the legal system must adapt to a trauma-informed lens that will figure out how to keep the victims and their children safe from patterns of coercive control. Failing to recognize these patterns leads to escalation and often devastating outcomes. Counselors do not always help. We are taught to "remain neutral" in couples counselling and do not always screen for abuse. We engage in "change work" with victims which can be victim blaming. We also have our own cultural biases. Instead, we must screen for abuse, see individuals in a couple separately, identify abusive strategies, and examine our biases. This capstone explores the etiology and content of narcissistic strategies, why we as a culture have failed to recognize and stop these kinds of abuses, and what we can do to help.

Keywords: feminist, domestic abuse, coercive control

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I would most like to acknowledge my children, Ava, and Kodiak. Sometimes the pursuit of this capstone allowed them extra screen time, sometimes dinner was late, and often playdates replaced family time. At times, I know they missed having a mother who was fully present and stress-free. Thank you to my mother (AKA “Aima”) who has supported me with meals, childcare, intellectual reflection, and financial support. I also would like to acknowledge and thank my professor Dr. Laleh Skrenes and my reader Dr. Christopher Kinman for helping me make this paper readable and for keeping me on track.

Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to the women in my peer support group which is for women who are in “difficult relationships”. We call ourselves the “Wonder Women.” The resistance, suffering, and strength I had the privilege to witness in our meetings provided the motivation for this paper. These are real life superheroes. Their fight to provide the best lives for their children, to resist abuse, to find support, to come back to their authentic selves, and to be understood by those in positions of power provides me with hope for humanity. I hope, dear Wonder Women, that you are reading this. I also hope that you know how much energy, insight, and fight you have instilled in me to work towards a society where none of this had to happen to us. Thank you for all you gave and continue to give in this pursuit and to help each other and fellow survivors of domestic violence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> Our social institutions allow us to express and share so little of our real human needs that we are forced to lock them up inside ourselves. We all bear witness to the results: the explosions and implosions of these pent-up feelings are the stuff of the private tragedies and public violence and the disorder of our everyday life. Let us acknowledge, then . . .that the personal is political; that the test of a social system is its ability to translate the personal into the public and at the same time to make community a real part of one's daily, personal life through meaningful participation in the decisions that shape us all.
>
> --Joan Kelly's 1976 commencement address at Sarah Lawrence College

Sam and I like to mountain bike together. She is especially powerful on the technical uphill. That is how we met and discovered a similar story. She was still with her abuser. He never hit her, but threats were woven into looks and tones of voice. They escalated in moments when he felt less in control such as the time she confronted him for driving with his children in the car while drunk and high. He often tells their three boys that their mother is "crazy" and not to trust her. She said once to me that she wished he were violent so that she could get a restraining order. When she finally insisted on separation, he reigned terror down on her and her children. She put up cameras around her home. She changed the locks and installed a security system. Sam was afraid for her life and doing everything in her power to protect herself and her children from experiencing more violence. She tragically got her wish one day when he threw her down and kicked her while two of her children looked on. He has been incapable of holding down a job and making money in his addiction and threatened her for child support. Luckily for her, the system validates physical violence. And this violence happened to be witnessed by a neighbor. Sam got a temporary restraining order. However, the abuse and threats continued. He

works to collude with his children and even attempted to coerce one to testify in court for him. He has shown their 15-year-old affidavits that his mother wrote to use in court. The parole officer and victim services said there was nothing they could do and recommended she get protection through family law. When she showed up in court, the judge announced that he had not even read her application or affidavit. Yet, he had read her abuser's 110-pageaffidavit full of lies and false accusations. In court, the judge congratulated her ex for not breaching when in her affidavit there were multiple proven instances of breach. Her lawyer contributed to the problem by assuming that the ex would be reasonable in court. The lawyer later admitted that her ex "did not seem to have a grasp of the English language." The abuse continues for her and always will because she needs to co-parent with this man. She worries that he is driving his children while drunk and/or high. Luckily, she has a wonderful job, an enormous circle of understanding and loving friends, and a support group for other women who are going through similar challenges.

The goal of this capstone is to explore how counselling can help parents and children who are coping with narcissistic partner abuse. Often families are only helped by our institutions and support systems when abuse is physically violent. However, non-physical abuse can also have a profound impact on victims and children. In fact, many victims of both profess that the psychological, financial, and other types on non-violent abuse were more distressing than the violent abuse. Not only is there rarely help available for victims of abuse unless there is violence, counsellors and others often fail to even recognize it. Often victims live in fear of their ex-partners even after they have left because abuse usually escalates post separation. Children in these families suffer in many ways. Legal repercussions and enforcement of court orders for this abuse are minimal; the institutions that are meant to support victims often perpetuate harm such as financial abuse; and there are few legal means to protect children from the parent that is

abusive. This capstone will investigate ways to identify abuse, explore the causes of narcissistic abuse, explore the impacts of this abuse on partners and children, and offer treatment pathways for children, partners, and abusers.

Defining Terms

Coercive Control

"Any incident or *pattern of incidents* of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality" (UK Home Office, 2013). An on-going pattern of domination using strategies that include irrational demands, surveillance, isolation, and the realistic threat of negative consequences such as physical harm. (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2021).

Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD)

C-PTSD has been included as a diagnostic category in the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Edition, consisting of six symptom clusters: the three PTSD criteria of reexperiencing, avoidance, and hypervigilance, in addition to three disturbances of self-organization (DSO) symptoms defined as emotional dysregulation, interpersonal difficulties, and negative self-concept" (Jowett et al., 2020).

Domestic Violence

Oxford Languages (2022) defines domestic violence as "violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner." This culturally accepted definition is misleading because it does not include coercive control. The United Nations (2021) defines domestic violence as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used

to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Statistics Canada defines police-reported intimate partner violence as violent offences that occur between current and former partners who may or may not live together (Burczycka, 2018). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police defines IPV as, broadly, harm caused by an intimate partner, which takes many forms but is often the result of an attempt to gain or assert power or control over a partner. (Cotter, 2021, p.5)

Narcissistic Partner Abuse

Refers to the emotional, physical, sexual, or financial forms of abuse that create a pattern of coercion and control over an intimate partner. This abuse can range from mild putdowns to extreme violence. It does not necessarily include the diagnosis of narcissism. Indeed, the abuser may not even be pathologically narcissistic.

Narcissistic Victim Syndrome (NVS)

A term created by Christine Louis de Canonville (2022) to describe the unique effects of covert abuse. Often the victim will be suffering from PTSD or C-PTSD and will often experience dissociation, may experience low self-esteem, self-mutilation, suicidal thought, chronic pain, depression, and somatizations.

Resilience

A universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity (Grotberg, 1995). Resiliency implies acceptance of the status quo while resistance implies agency.

Resistance

A ubiquitous response to violence. At times resistance is violent. Sometimes resistance means staying silent, codling the abuser, or maintaining the status quo. Open defiance would in most cases lead to further and more severe abuse, therefore open defiance is the least common form of resistance (Coates & Wade, 2004).

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse, also called coercive control or intimate partner violence, is marked by the efforts of the perpetrator to exert power and control over the victim using intimidation, isolation, and control (Stark, 2007). Sometimes this type of violence is called narcissistic abuse. This is the case usually in situations where the perpetrator meets the clinical definition of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) although it is rare to get such a diagnosis as few with these symptoms willingly submit themselves for testing. The abuse can fall into many categories including but not limited to emotional, financial, physical, isolation, using threats, using male privilege or other privilege, using the children, minimizing, denying, and blaming (see Appendix B: Power and Control Wheel). Milstead (2018) writes:

> The abuser takes advantage of societal norms that assume everyone participates in social relationships with a basic level of empathy, which makes it easy for the abuser to convince the survivor (and everyone else) that no abuse is taking place. Because the abuse is 'hidden' using deceptions, it is difficult for survivors to recognize, understand, and escape it. (pp. 19-20)

This type of betrayal is particularly harmful to the victims as the psychological and physical outcomes can be severe.

Prevalence

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an under reported phenomenon for many reasons. Rates of coercive control and IPV are therefore difficult to assess. In 2019 in Canada, 107,810 people experienced IPV according to police data (Government of Canada, 2022). 79% of those were women. Rates were 3.5 times higher for women than for men. In 2018, 44% of women who had ever been in an intimate partner relationship (about 6.2 million women aged 15 and over) reported experiencing either psychological, physical, or sexual abuse in the context of an intimate relationship in their lifetime (Government of Canada, 2022). Worldwide, a female is killed by their intimate partner or other family member every 11 minutes (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). In Canada, a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six days (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2021). In Canada, 48% of female homicides were committed by a spouse or intimate partner (CCSJ, 2013). Only 4% of male homicides were committed by an intimate partner. Women, relative to men, were considerably more likely to have experienced the most severe forms of IPV in their lifetime (Government of Canada, 2022). For example, eight percent (1% for men) were made to perform sex acts they did not want to perform. 3% of women were confined or locked in a room or other space compared to 0.5% of men. 10 % of women versus 2 % of men were forced to have sex, and 7 % of women versus 1% of men have experienced being choked. In the United States, one in four women and one in nine men experience severe intimate partner violence or stalking (Black et al., 2011). Ansara and Hindin (2010) found that men were more likely than women to report that the intimate partner violence had no effect on them and were generally less likely than women to report most of the negative reactions.

Prevalence and impacts of IPV are higher for aboriginal women, women in rural communities, disabled women, immigrant and refugee women, and women in poverty. Indigenous women are almost 3.5 times more likely to report violent victimization and more than 8 times more likely to be killed by their spouse or partner than non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2014). Despite composing only 16% of the female population of Canada, women who life in rural areas represent 34% of victims of domestic femicide. Women with disabilities are twice as likely as women who do not have a disability to be a victim of a violent crime (Statistics Canada, 2014). Immigrant and refugee women fear losing immigration status and their children if they access formal supports. There are also language and cultural barriers. Financial dependence can also be an issue.

Impacts

> Narcissistic abuse is a huge trauma made out of a million tiny shocks
> that shatter the memory, erode the self and break your life into fragments.
> It's psychological terrorism at its worst, and confusing as hell at its best...
> Why would the same person who claimed to love and care for you hurt you –
> over and over without a hint of empathy or remorse? (Shahida Arabi as cited in Roberts, 2021, p. 8)

Studies show emotional abuse may be the most damaging form of maltreatment causing adverse consequences equivalent to, or more severe than, those of other forms of abuse (Hart et al., 1996). Follingstad et al. (1990) found that 72% of women interviewed claimed that psychological abuse had a more severe impact on them than the physical abuse. Abuse can get worse after separation (Campbell, 2017). Hardesty (2002) found that victims reported 35% more abuse after separation. Part of the problem for victims is that we mostly have defined abuse as

the use of physical violence. Now we understand it takes many forms such as isolation, financial control, threats, gas lighting, endangering children, disrupting the other parent's relationship with the children, and blaming (See Appendices B and C: Abuse Wheel and Post-Separation Abuse Wheel) all used to exert power and control. Post separation, perpetrators often double their abusive tactics leaving victims feeling that they will never be safe from their abuser.

Financial abuse can be subtle; however, it has enormous impacts. One survey reported that ninety-nine percent of survivors of domestic abuse experienced financial abuse (Adams, 2008). This can result in loss of job, loss of housing, loss of credit, and the loss of ability to work. Impacts of poverty on survivors are beyond the scope of this inquiry but are numerous and severe.

Women who experience abuse are three to five times more likely to experience depression, suicidality, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Golding, 1999 as cited in Dutton et al., 2006). Psychological abuse is a greater predictor of PTSD than physical abuse among women (Dutton et al., 2006). Wathen (2012) reported that physical health problems associated with intimate partner violence include chronic pain, disability, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, sleep disorders, and general reductions in life quality.

Children in situations of partner abuse do not escape unscathed. Men who abuse their partners are much more likely than other men to abuse their children (Bancroft, 2002). Children who experience violence in the home have twice the rate of psychiatric disorders as children from non-violent homes (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2021). Posttraumatic symptoms, mood difficulties, and behavioural problems have been reported in this population of children (Bedi & Goddard, 2007). Suicide rates are twice as high for children who witness 10 or more incidents of

parental domestic violence before the age of 16 (Fuller-Thomson et al., 2016). Physical impacts include premature birth, low birth weight, anxiety, depression, asthma, allergies, stomach aches, post-traumatic stress, mood swings, frequent illness, weight concerns, substance use problems, mental health conditions, chronic pain, pain conditions, and difficulty forming attachments (Lalonde et al., 2020). Children who experience violence in the home were found to be 15 times more likely to be physically and/or sexually assaulted than the national average (UNICEF, 2006). The economic impacts of abuse include poverty which lead to significant impacts on health.

Children might be forced to spy on a parent or be told they are to blame for the violence because of something they did. They might have to keep family secrets or witness family members get arrested. They might hear violence and be unable to stop it. They might be used as a hostage. After separation, children often have unsupervised time with their abusive parent. This parent might use the children to further control the ex-partner. Or the abuser might refuse to pay child support. Some decide to take half custody despite not caring much about parenting so that they do not have to pay as much child support. Difficult decisions about the children relating to schooling, after school activities, or various medical issues are often used as tools of manipulation.

van der Kolk (2000) illustrates how our understanding of trauma is evolving. Previously, we thought of violent trauma by a stranger to be the most impactful. This is not the case for women and children. Parents are responsible for violent attacks on children in four out of five cases. In Canada, 49% of the perpetrators of police reported violence against women were intimate partners (Statistics Canada, 2013). In homes where spousal abuse occurs, children are

abused at a rate 1500% higher than the national average. Serious injury occurs in 1/3 of domestic assault and only ¼ of stranger assault.

Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective helps not only to understand why domestic abuse, violent crime, and sexual assault is gendered in our culture, but it also offers a solution. Feminism aims for equality between women and men socially, economically, and politically (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). “Feminist therapy holds that women share many of the characteristics of oppressed people and that women have been denied equal rights and an equal voice” (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018, p. 323). Johnson (2005) explains how the system of patriarchy leads men to exert power and control over women in particular but also over other men. He explains that a society is patriarchal because it is male dominated, male identified, and male centered. It is organized around an obsession with control because it is a system of privilege that elevates one group by oppressing another.

> Under patriarchy, control shapes not only the broad outlines of social life but also men’s inner lives. The more men see control as central to their sense of self, well-being, worth, and safety, the more driven they feel to go after it and to organize their inner and outer lives around it. This takes men away from connection to others and themselves and toward disconnection. This is because control involves a relationship between controller and controlled, and disconnection is an integral part of that relationship. In order to control something, we have to see it as a separate “other.” (Johnson, 2005, p.14)

Hill (2020) writes, “Men don’t abuse women because society tells them it’s OK. Men abuse women because society tells them they are entitled to be in control” (Para. 7).

Fundamental change has not occurred, Johnson (2005) explains, despite the appearances of progress. This includes laws that make gender-based discrimination illegal, that some women have been elevated to powerful positions, and that there is less tolerance for overt sexist behavior. The prevalence of gender-based violence and the minimal changes of women's income equality and unpaid labor, however, illustrate the continuing problem. Education about these forces in client's lives is one route that leads to healing.

Gaps

Our cultural norm of defining "domestic violence" or "partner abuse" only as actions that are violent physically or sexually has created a major lag in understanding and responding to domestic abuse. Hill (2019) writes that for more than 40 years, women and children have been saying that except for extreme violence, the coercive control is the worst part of the abuse. Victims commonly say, "I wish he'd just hit me" because this is the only way to get help or recognition by community services or the law.

Counselling has been part of the problem in cases of abuse. In training for couples counselling, we are taught to "put the relationship first" and fail to train how to notice when the relationship could be a source of trauma for one member. Therapists often think of relationships as mutual (i.e., it takes two to tango). However, in cases of violence and abuse, acts are mostly unidirectional (Coates & Wade, 2007). Bancroft (2002) asserts that there can be no effective therapy with couples in situations of abuse. Taylor Cameron, a counselor that provides support to victims of domestic violence, explains that "engaging in change focused work when a client is experiencing [interpersonal violence] may be harmful" (Bray, 2019). Focusing on change of the victim subtly implicates her for the abuse.

Many experts in narcissism and abuse warn against couples counselling when one partner is motivated by power and control (Bancroft, 2002; Dytch, n.d; Kitzinger, 1993). Counselling has failed this population and often contributed to the oppression of the abused. After separation, couples have few options that work for helping them to communicate and act in the best interest of the children. Feminist family systems counselling contributes to understanding power dynamics and how to forgo neutrality for accountability.

Abusive people who do a lot of therapy become more difficult to work with as they develop more skills of condescension and manipulation. Bancroft (2002) discusses how the *safety* requirement for therapy cannot be met if the abused is in the presence of the abuser. Often the abuser's tactics are subtle and can slip past a counselor. They might threaten with a look or with language that has meaning only to the couple. Also, often the victim will be punished later for making the abuser look bad in counselling.

It is almost impossible to gain legal protection against an abuser for victims and their children unless that abuse was physically violent. When children are involved, a victim will most often not find peace after leaving an abuser. The legal system tends to minimize this abuse and offer no support for the parents that are working in the best interest of the children. Children are deeply affected by lack of access to services and opportunities as often the signature of the other parent is required for educational assessments, passports, healthcare, etc. The best interest of the children is exactly what suffers even post separation.

Self-Reflection

I am learning how important language is. I did my best to change language in this capstone that I noticed came from bias or imprecision. I am sure that I missed many

opportunities to do better and to be more sensitive as I am a product of my culture, my relationships, and my own nature.

I have many privileges in our culture. I am white, cisgendered, and neuro-typical. I am not overweight. I come from a wealthy family who provided me with a private education through university. I have a large supportive extended family that gives me the felt sense of not being alone in the world. I also experienced violence in my home growing up. My mom left my dad because of his addictions when I was eight years old. My brother joined a cult when I was 15 and he was 18. Witnessing his entrapment and learning about cults in general is a source of my understanding of narcissistic abuse. I realize more and more as I age the impacts of my gender on my personality, choices, and behaviors. I chose a male dominated career and felt compelled to constantly prove my competence. I was the fifth American female to be certified as an IFMGA mountain guide in the United States and continue to be one of 8-12 % of females in North America who hold that title. At times I felt the burden of representing my gender amidst a belief system of toxic masculinity. To achieve success, I had to at times supress parts of myself and strengths that were not valued. I was great at "code switching" where we take on the values of the dominant class to fit in. In 2006, I met a man who brought me to Canada. Despite red flags, I married him. We had two beautiful children, but something was off. I felt alone and devalued. I developed health problems and suffered from depression. We went to counselling at this stage which contributed to my confusion. The counsellor did not catch the abusive or narcissistic behaviors. He added to my oppression by being influenced by my husband's persuasiveness, by treating us as having equal power in the relationship, by blindly working for the relationship, and by working to point out how my perceptions were wrong. When I finally left my marriage, it was the bravest thing I have ever done. I am slowly building back a beautiful life. But my stress

capacity soon felt overwhelmed by the impact of divorce on my children, the challenges of single parenting, post separation abuse, and the grief and loss of the fantasy of what I was working towards in my life. My son, who is autistic, had a difficult time adjusting to our separation and would not tolerate other caregivers, would sometimes talk of despair and suicide, and ran away from school to my house almost every day for years. I got a concussion at the start of Covid which deleted my internal coping capacities. My anxiety spiked along with other symptoms of C-PTSD. So, in 2020, I started two peer support groups that are still acting as an incredible support for me. One is for woman in or recently out of abusive relationships. Witnessing the horror of what these women have gone through continues to act as fuel for this research and my goal to be a counsellor that can help rather than harm in these situations. One cannot afford the ongoing financial abuse and might have to sell her home; another had her children kidnapped by her ex and there was no legal recourse for justice because that parent was the father; many cannot share any sporting equipment between households because the narcissist holds it ransom, another found hand shaped bruises on her three-year-old after he returned from a visit with his dad. The social worker said that there was nothing that they could do without more evidence. Another mother continues to be told by counsellors and courts that she must be partly responsible for why the children do not want to go with their father; a few were beaten in front of their young children. The abusers' behaviours are arguably less horrific than the invalidating responses by law enforcement, lawyers, courts, and even counsellors or psychiatrists. I hope to use this research in my future work with families. I will be sure to screen for narcissistic abuse in all couples that I work with. I will be sure to meet people individually right away to adequately screen for abusive behaviors and imbalances in power and control. I will advocate for systemic

change such as education about abuse in schools. I hope to spread awareness about narcissistic abuse and the impacts so that legal and social supports can be more responsive.

I recognize some of the ways that I am also victim of patriarchal thoughts, ideas, behaviours, and beliefs. I will work hard to counteract this in my work with individuals and couples. I am sure that I am also at risk of perpetuating any of the other biases that are born out of our hierarchical culture. I will work to counteract this with self-awareness, error-correction, and self-compassion. I will seek supervision and peer support to aid in my growth as a trauma informed counsellor. I will continue to do research and learn about the forces of our culture and beliefs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Culture

> Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold
>
> inside in the absence of an empathetic witness
>
> ---Levine and Maté, 2010, p. xii

Feminism has brought light to our culture's inequities of class, gender, power, and safety (Prouty Lyness & Prouty, 2007). Feminist couple therapy focuses on how these inequities might show up in relationship. Urena-Ravelo (2016) explains that an abuse culture is the framework of violence that we live in. It occurs on the macro and micro-level interpersonally and institutionally. This is a culture where certain people are considered stronger, superior, and more justified in any action they might take than others. It is a top-down dynamic that allows for discrimination and abuse.

Victim Blaming

One aspect of our abuse culture is victim blaming. Fast and Richardson (2019) attribute Canada's difficulty in naming and addressing white male supremacy as a better reason for systemic violence and oppression against Indigenous women than the prevalent argument that the reason is the "vulnerability" of these women. Allan Wade says that our decades long project of tampering with the minds of women has not worked in changing the behavior of violent men. Fast and Richardson suggests as a method of understanding cultural context, we should ask the question, "Where you live, who is the most likely to be blamed for a crime they did not commit?" and "Who is most likely to get away with a crime they did commit" (pp. 7-8).

Perfect Victim Bias

Culture also holds a bias in upholding a standard of perfection for victims. Randall (2004) explains two of the biases against domestic violence survivors. One is that women who eventually killed their abusive partners are responded to with the question, *why did they not just leave?* The second bias is the victim who recants or refuses to prosecute her violent abuser. Unfortunately, we do not assume that the victim could be making rational and reasonable decisions when taking into consideration the circumstances of their lives. When my sister was raped, for example, the court system deemed it entirely appropriate to investigate and report her entire sexual history. Many women do not prosecute for sexual violence because they know that the fact that they had some alcohol, were dressed a certain way, or had "a reputation" would make it impossible to be validated in court.

Legal System and Marriage

We live in a culture where our primary institutions are a tool for further narcissistic abuse such as marriage and the law. Campbell (2017) outlines how batterers take advantage of the court system to abuse their ex-spouse. She explains how most courts are not prepared to address the common strategies such as refusing to pay child support, using the court system to prolong contact, continued gaslighting, or forcing the victim to return to court many times. She explains how judges commonly misread behavior of victims and batterers. Trauma and resistance can make a victim appear disorganized, angry, helpless, or confused. Batterers often present as highly likeable, calm, and devoted. Their accounts seem more reasonable and rational. A common term used in narcissistic abuse survivor forums is DARVO which stands for the common behaviors to expect: Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender (Freyd, 1997). Batterers also commonly argue that the victim has turned the children against the batterer. This is

a widely discredited theory knows as *parental alienation* (Campell, 2017). Arabi (2017) sums it up:

> While there have been some cases where justice has been served to the survivors and victims of covert psychological violence, most of the survivor community can agree: whether it be through the enabling behavior of the court systems, law enforcement, family members or friends, the malignant narcissist or sociopathic predator can easily get away with their malicious behavior, usually without being held accountable. (para. 3)

Shaw (2014) states, "When it comes to recognizing and addressing the relational system of the traumatizing narcissist, however, we are dealing with a kind of violence for which no court will mandate treatment or punishment" (p. 73).

Part of the reason why courts fail to recognize this type of violence is that we "privatize" violence against women. Our culture assumes that the intimacy of marriage creates a pattern of consent. Rape within marriage was only recognized as rape in Canada in 1983 (BBC, 2017). Indeed, there are still cases such as one in 2017 when a Canadian man was found not guilty by Justice Robert Smith for raping his wife because he *believed* he could have sex with her whenever he wanted (BBC, 2017).

In Canada the burden of proof rests on the woman that makes a report of violence to the police. Canadian Criminal Code offenses are narrowly defined and do not account for patterns of abuse or most non-physical abuse. The specific offenses do not include violence against women. Instead, they must fall under the titles: offenses of assault, sexual assault, criminal harassment, threats of violence, forcible confinement, and homicide (Statistics Canada, 2014). The RCMP will call many things "a domestic dispute" and refuse to get involved. Once there is a pattern of consent in an intimate relationship, it is difficult to prove with current evidentiary requirements

that there was an assault. Many of these cases are never reported. Violence against women is "privatized" through the assumptions of intimacy and mutuality (Women and Gender Equity Canada, 2021).

How Culture Conceals Abuse

Shaw (2014) says that often the violence perpetrated by traumatic narcissists escapes detection and accountability because it is not always physical. He describes the "soul murder" of traumatic narcissists:

> The traumatizing narcissist recruits others . . . into a relationship that seductively offers the promise of bestowal of special gifts . . . However, the traumatizing narcissist will soon find cause to accuse the other of insufficient concern and of selfishness. The other will then come to be ashamed of and disconnected from his own needs, other than his need to stave off disapproval from and rejection by the traumatizing narcissist. (Shaw, 2014, p. 13)

Narcissists can also escape detection because they can perform "cognitive empathy" even if they lack affective empathy (Arabi, 2017; Baron-Cohen, 2011).

Coates and Wade (2004, 2007) expose the ways that language is used to minimize perpetrator violence and victim resistance. "Perpetrators use language strategically in combination with physical or authority-based power to manipulate public appearances, promote their accounts in public discursive space, entrap victims, conceal victims, and avoid responsibility" (Coates and Wade, 2007, p. 512). "Mutualizing" is a form of concealing the violence of perpetrators by laying more blame on the victims (Coates & Wade, 2007).

> Our dominant language continues to portray perpetrators as ill-fated individuals who are compelled to violate others by forces they do not understand and cannot control.

> Metaphors related to steam locomotion or eruptions are commonly found in media and the helping discourses. This refusal to blame perpetrators is done through language such as “he just lost it!” “he was drunk,” “it was a crime of passion,” or “he was abused as a child.” These kinds of deterministic terms minimize responsibility and are found throughout the media, child protection files, courtrooms, and psychological assessments. (Kinewesquo & Bonnah, 2015, p. 207)

Non-violent Communication

Rosenberg (2005) conceptualizes two forms of communication: that of the jackal and that of the giraffe. He picks the giraffe because it has the biggest heart of all the animals. The language of the jackal is the language that we often use in our culture. When conflict arises, in jackal language, we use blame, punishment, guilt, and demands to communicate. This is a language of violence. The language of the giraffe on the other hand insists that we maintain consciousness of the beauty within ourselves and the person with whom we feel conflict. We refrain from making assessments or evaluations and instead make observations of what happened. Then we move to assessing ours and the other’s feelings and needs. The needs reflect values and our common humanity. The recognition of this common humanity and refraining from using moral judgement aids in reconciliation. Unfortunately, we are taught the language of the jackal which stems from and support hierarchical societies. This exploitative structure locks us into defense strategies and other counterproductive methods of meeting our needs or communicating them to others: these include the use of fear, shame, guilt, coercion, and violence.

Counselling Culture

Many studies point out how counselors unconsciously display their biases in therapy. Werner-Wilson et al. (1997) reported that therapists interrupt female clients significantly more than they interrupt their male clients. Kitzinger (1993) explains how the validation process is a route to healing for so many women but that doing this in therapy can carry risks. “In particular, therapists are selective about which experiences they will or won’t validate in therapy. Those of a client’s feelings and beliefs which are most similar to those of the therapist are “validated”; the others are more or less subtly ‘invalidated’” (Kitzinger, 1993, p. 33). ChenFeng and Galick (2015) reviewed videos of outpatient therapy with heterosexual couples and revealed that most therapists unintentionally reinforced gender stereotypes: specifically, that “men should be the authority,” that “women should be responsible for the relationship,” and that “women should protect men from shame” (Gerhart, 2018, p. 67). Haddock et al. (2000) found that eminent therapists rarely incorporated feminist principles, and that there was no significant increase in gender-informed practice over the past decade.

Carol Hanisch believes that the real problem for women is male supremacy which is not anything they can repair in therapy (Kitzinger, 1993). She coined the term, *the personal is political* in 1971 (Kitzinger, 1993). Raising children, sex, marriage, and our perceptions of our bodies are all shaped and influenced by the broader social context. This is especially relevant in cases of divorce with children. Kitzinger (1993) writes that therapy, instead of politicizing the personal, personalizes the political.

Therapists often pathologize resistance and instead focus on resilience (Andrews & Brewin, 1990; Andrews et al., 2003; Fast & Richardson, 2019). Fast and Richardson (2019) point out that the “literature shows that very often, at least half the time, victims receive some of

the blame" (as cited in Richardson & Wade, 2009, p. 10). One way that we might do this is by focusing on resilience in the oppressed rather than on their resistance. The resistance points to the violence of the abuser. "Unlike resistance, resilience does not offer a challenge to the status quo nor shed light on the actions of the perpetrator" (Fast & Richardson, 2019, p. 8). Pointing out resistance de-pathologizes behavior.

> It changes the narrative that the victim is an unworthy, passive object who did nothing to stop the violence, it contests the ideas that women choose violent men or that indigenous people like to be colonized, and it minimizes the use of trauma-based formulations that people were in a fight, flight, or freeze response and did not respond appropriately to the situation. (Fast and Richardson, 2019. p.8).

Resiliency implies acceptance of the status-quo while resistance implies agency. The details of resistance also might point to routes of healing.

Gender

Gender is an important part of understanding the mechanisms of domestic abuse. Randall (2004) writes, "the problem of men's violence against women is too pervasive to be understood as a pathology of a few individual men. Instead, it must be analysed within the context of the larger patterns of presumed male entitlement, authority, and power constructed in the culture more broadly" (p.112).

Some studies show that women and men experience almost equal levels of intimate partner violence. For example, Straus et al. (1980) conducted a self-report survey using an instrument called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The CTS omitted the context of abuse such as if it was in self-defence and added a hierarchy of behaviors that failed to take into account the power of threatened violence to enact control over a partner. These surveys led to conclusions

that violence in heterosexual relationships is perpetrated equally by both genders and dramatically failed to take into account the varying levels of the *impacts* of violence perpetrated by each gender.

Cotter (2018) examined gender and IPV and found that four out of ten women and one-third of men have experienced IPV in their lifetime. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 36.4% of women and 33.6% of men in the U.S. have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Smith et al., 2018). Additionally, over one third of U.S. women (36.4%) and men (34.2%) have suffered from psychological aggression by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Smith et al. 2018). Black et al. (2017) found that more than one in three women (35.6%) and more than one in four men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. These findings do not reflect coercive control and were obtained with a large sample (N= 18,049) using phone interviews. Instead, they could reflect violence that was performed as resistance, isolated incidents, or otherwise have little to do with *coercive control.*

Our gender norms have profound effects on how abusive strategies play out in relationships. Women or *female identifying* partners who use narcissistic strategies will more often and more quickly be discovered as having a mental illness. Men in our culture who use these strategies become leaders in companies or of countries and are typically admired for their effectiveness. Individual moments of "abuse" are so common that surveys that ask questions such as *have you ever been hit, slapped, pushed, yelled at, called names, or manipulated by an intimate partner* are not helpful. In fact, this simplification of what systemic abuse is simply perpetuates patriarchal goals. It ignores clear social problem of gendered violence. Women do

fight back sometimes physically as their form of resistance, but their violence does not create submission, fear, and control.

Patriarchy, according to Hill (2019), has entrenched women's subordination and men's entitlement to power. She notes how the legal system is designed to protect men from the power of the state but not to protect women and children from the power of men. Women were not given the right to buy property or enter into legal agreements in Quebec until 1964. In fact, women were only granted inclusion in the legal definition of "persons" in 1929 which in effect allowed women to hold office. White women were allowed to vote in federal elections by 1918, but the Northwest territories did not allow women the right to vote provincially until 1940. Despite both spouses working full-time, women continue to complete the majority of household chores (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014). Women in Canada did 1.5 more hours per day of unpaid labor than men in 2015 (Moyser & Burlock, 2018). Risman (2004) emphasized that gender as a social structure sets guidelines for behavior through "'cognitive image rules' that are so taken for granted that people may be unaware of why they act or feel as they do (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013, p. 432).

Ninety-seven percent of violent domestic abusers are men who have female partners (Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2016). This does not discount that women are sometimes violent in response to violence or in fights. Men's overall rates of violence are nine times greater than the rates of female violence. 86 % of abusers brought to court in Massachusetts for restraining orders were male (Klein, 2009). 92% of abusers placed on probation for domestic violence in Rhode Island were male. 84% of the victims in both Charlotte, N.C. and Berkeley, California were female. 41% of male victims who were later involved in new incidents of interpersonal violence were identified as the suspects of the new

incident compared to 26.3% of women (Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2016). Domestic abuse data for Merseyside Police in England found that 95% of coercive control victims were women and 74% of perpetrators were men. (Barlow et al., 2018). Over half of women's violence overall is in response to male violence (Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2016). A study done on police records in the south of England found that 89 percent of victims of coercive control were female and 77.87 percent of victims of actual bodily harm in domestic abuse were female. (Barlow & Walklate, 2021). Cotter (2021) found that women were more likely to experience fear, anxiety, and feelings of being controlled or trapped by a partner. Four out of 10 women who experienced IPV felt afraid of their partner at some point while only 9% of men who experienced IPV felt fear of their partner. He suggests that this statistic might reflect the incidence of *coercive control* more accurately.

Stark (2007) explains how women's attempts to dominate men are more likely to fail because of sexual discrimination that privileges men to the material and social resources needed to gain advantage in power struggles. Also, there are "norms" for female behavior that conflict with abusive behaviors. These norms include deferring to men, being nice, not expressing anger, keeping the peace, taking responsibility for how men treat you, and not being too demanding (Stark, 2007). Stark (2007) suggests that control is achieved by challenging women's feminine identities by criticizing their appearance, home making, mothering, or care-taking skills. The normal rituals of courtship and marriage hide coercive control in plain sight. This makes it very difficult to prosecute. For example, financial abuse can be hidden because it is normal for a man to take control of household finances.

The literature has consistently found evidence to suggest that those high in narcissism, versus those low in narcissistic traits, are more likely to perpetrate abuse upon an intimate partner

(Fields, 2012). However, studies of prevalence of cluster B personality disorders can be misleading if we use these diagnoses as predictors of gender in incidents of coercive control. Eddy (2021) explains that 53% of those with Borderline Personality Disorder are women, 38% of those with Narcissistic Personality Disorder are women, and 26% of those with antisocial personality disorder are women. These women, however, are more likely to be pathologized than actually maintain control in our culture.

There are undeniable limitations in seeing any phenomenon through the binary lens of gender constructs. When a man does experience abuse, statistics in Canada demonstrate that they are much less likely than women to talk about it with someone (42% of men compared to 68 % of women). While 13% of women have contacted victim services for experiencing abuse in the last 12 months only 4% of men who have experienced abuse have done so. If men do seek out help, there are generally fewer services for male victims than for women (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Lysova et al., 2020).

Gender aside, the prevalence of IPV was notably higher among Indigenous women, LGBTQ2 women, LGBTQ2 men, and women with disabilities. (Heidinger 2021, Jaffray 2021a, Jaffray 2021b, Savage 2021a, Savage 2021b). It is possible that focusing on gender pathways for narcissistic abuse could hide other pathways and make them more difficult to identify.

The Abuser

> The traumatizing narcissist defends against shame as if his life depends on warding it off; his assumption of moral superiority and perfection is his most powerful defense against the threat of an outbreak of his disavowed shame.
>
> --Shaw, 2014, p.73

Caution must be used when using any label. Labels tend to hide complexity and individuality. They also can hide violence. Coates and Wade (2004) point out that attributing violent behaviour to a disorder turns the perpetrator into a victim. It is important to hold the DSM-5 definition of Narcissistic Personality Disorder lightly by understanding that the DSM only seeks to find clusters of behavior, symptoms, or signs. “People using narcissistic strategies” might be a better way to explain those who perpetuate narcissistic abuse rather than calling them pathologically narcissistic.

The Cluster B personality disorders are some diagnoses that might be given to people who use narcissistic strategies. These include Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD), Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), and psychopathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Narcissistic traits can occur on a spectrum from non-pathological to pathological. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (2013) NPD includes: A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and with lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood, as indicated by at least five of the following:

- Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements, expects to be recognized as superior without actually completing the achievements)
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of success, power, brilliance, beauty, or perfect love.
- Believes that they are “special” and can only be understood by or should only associate with other special people (or institutions).
- Requires excessive admiration.
- Has a sense of entitlement, such as an unreasonable expectation of favorable treatment or compliance with his or her expectations).

- Is exploitative and takes advantage of others to achieve their own ends.
- Lacks empathy and is unwilling to identify with the needs of others.
- Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of them.
- Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors and attitudes.

A careful evaluation of the different aspects of a person's life and an understanding of the person's childhood development can assist in the evaluation and diagnosis of NPD. There are two basic subtypes of NPD. These include the grandiose and the vulnerable subtypes. The vulnerable subtype is sometimes referred to as "covert" or "vulnerable" and can be difficult to spot. The vulnerable subtype presents with hypersensitivity and defensiveness. (Mitra & Fluyau, 2022).

It is a common misconception that narcissism stems from self-love (Hall, 2019). The narcissist's grandiosity, beliefs, and strategies are an elaborate defense system driven by feelings of shame and unworthiness (Hall, 2019). Hall (2019) believes that narcissism stems from an early lack of healthy attachment that causes a failure of the child to develop a resilient internal love of self. This view has some limitations. Feminist treatises point out how mother blaming is a common scapegoat for many mental disorders (autism, schizophrenia, anxiety, etc.). While there are serious impacts to children when their primary attachment figure is not "good enough" at connecting, there are serious cultural impacts to believing that poor "mothering" is *always* the cause of anything. This is how we have developed a culture where mothers can never be good enough in the eyes of teachers, counsellors, the law, etc. Another way to avoid mother blaming is to assume that the mother is simply an agent of the culture. If the primary caregiver is stressed, unsupported, told to parent in a way that contradicts instincts, or coping with their own traumas, they might not meet the attachment needs of the child. Other explanations for narcissism include

exposure to narcissistic abuse by a cult leader (Shaw, 2014) or an abusive regime. Stein (2017) points out how cult leaders use intense shaming alternating with love bombing to create disorganized attachments (Stein, 2017). There are also neurobiological explanations. Dadds et al. (2006) found that psychopathic traits are linked to an inability to recognize emotions (especially fear) in others or make eye contact with caregivers. Kahn (2012) reported in the New York Times that those that study psychopathic traits in children find these traits in those as young as three and that *callous-unemotional* traits have a calculated heritability of 80%. Also, not all who experience the same type of abuse or attachment wound will develop narcissistic strategies of defense.

Narcissistic strategies are only one method for coping with shame and overwhelming negative emotions. Other strategies include depression, anxiety, healthy coping/healing, addiction, etc. There is a theory of externalizing versus internalizing emotions (Göbel et al., 2016). Some people are prone to externalizing behaviors while others are prone to internalizing behaviors. The traumatizing narcissist tends to be prone to externalizing. "To the extent that he succeeds in keeping inadequacy and dependency external, he can sustain in his internal world his delusions of shame-free, self-sufficient superiority" (Shaw, 2014, p. 11). Narcissistic behaviors are a defense mechanism. The DSM-V definitions are simply the methods of externalizing shame. The core emotion that must be defended against is a sense of unworthiness.

It is important to note that not all narcissists have power to be abusive. Also, it is important to note that narcissistic abuse does not only occur in intimate partnerships. It can occur in friendships, in the workplace, with parents, children, political leaders, etc.

It might not be helpful to use the term narcissist at all as this is pathologizing. It also might be a way to minimize the culpability of the abuser by determining that they are mentally unwell.

Few people with NPD submit themselves for testing so tend not to be diagnosed anyway. Many professionals believe that NPD is not a condition that can be healed. This is also true for BPD, APD, and psychopathy. These labels may not be therapeutic and should not be used haphazardly. Also, narcissistic strategies can be used by those who are not pathologically narcissistic.

Understanding Abusive Behaviour

Abusive behaviors and strategies are too numerous to name although working to understand them helps us identify when these strategies could be at work in the relationships of our clients. Successful abusers escape detection. “The thinking and behavior patterns of people with NPD are so far outside of normal rules of engagement that they are virtually impossible to comprehend unless you’ve lived with them” (Hall, 2019, p.188). Coercive control consists of a pattern of behaviors designed to provide the abuser with a supply of evidence that allows them to feel better about themselves or to prove that they are better than others. This is referred to as “narcissistic supply” (Hall, 2019, p. 57). Brown (2009) identified the following three “inabilities” in individuals with pathological narcissism: The inability to a) “sustain consistent and mounting positive, non-manipulative change,” b) “grow to any significant and authentic emotional, spiritual and relational depth,” and c) “to have true empathic insight about how their behavior affects others” (p. 155). Without these rudimentary relational skills, “nothing else can happen in them or their relationships”; as a result, partners in relationships with pathological narcissists face “inevitable harm” (Brown 2009, p. 46).

Stein (2017) describes emotional violence as an attack on attachment. She explains how a cult leader used love and fear alternately to create disorganized attachment which causes the person to become both dependent and dissociated from their self (Stein, 2017). “The dissociating

rejection of the individual's own interpretation of their individual experience" (Stein, 2017, p. 156) is a warning sign.

Economic Abuse

A survey of domestic violence survivors enrolled in the Allstate Moving Ahead financial literacy program found that 99 percent of survivors experience economic abuse**,** including financial control and exploitation, such as having their earnings taken or being given an allowance (Adams, 2008). There are many ways that abusers can economically abuse their partners and it is important to understand so that counsellors can help to identify what is going on. The abuser might control or withhold money or prevent their partner from working or attending school or job training. Sometimes the control of family finances by the male partner arises from gender roles. Women's lack of confidence in financial matters can be a result of ingrained sexism as well. Abusers might get credit cards or other bank accounts in the victim's name and destroy their credit (Townson, 2009). Abusers might hide assets, not allow their partner to have access to the household bank accounts, or refuse to pay child support. Some abusive people intentionally deplete their partner's resources to make them more dependent upon them. This can be done in many ways. They might lie to hide their resources or income, demand that their partner pay bills, they might steal or destroy property.

Abusers might make it impossible for their victims to maintain a job because they harass them at work, withhold transportation or childcare, or use physical violence. MacGregor et al. (2021) performed a scoping review of intimate partner violence and the impacts on work. They explain that harassment can occur at work in person or via phone calls, texts, or social media. Perpetrators may interfere with workers' ability to get work by being restrained, having car keys hidden, withholding childcare, or otherwise impeding gainful work. Work performance is also

impacted when workers are distressed, tired, injured, or have difficulty concentrating. Swanberg et al. (2005) estimated that rates of IPV victims being bothered at work is between 36% and 75%. Forty percent of women who had experienced domestic abuse said it made it difficult for them to get to work. 8.5 % lost their jobs because of their abuse (MacGregor et al., 2021).

Legal abuse can often fall under the category of economic abuse. In our culture, white men are given more respect by many judges who are also mostly white men. Also, our laws are set up to recognize isolated events rather than patterns of behavior. Drawn out legal battles are an effective way for someone with more money to reign terror quickly and easily on someone who does not have resources or time to devote to lawyer fees and courts. Some ways that abusers use the legal system is to continually frustrate the process by refusing to sign documents or show up in court. Another method is by making it impossible to mediate a divorce because they are starting from a mindset of punishing the other spouse. Another is to simply win court battles after lying and emphasizing the faults of their victim. Even in situations where the victim wins in court, there is little enforcement of the court orders or repercussions for breaches.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is one technique used by narcissistic abusers. These techniques are powerful mind games that eventually cause the victim to be unable to trust their own perception, memory, or judgment (Louis de Canonville, 2022). It is one of the primary pathways to a low sense of self-esteem or worth. The term originates from the 1938 play, “Gaslight” where a husband manipulates his wife to make her think she is crazy so that he can send her to a mental institution and steal her inheritance (Diguilio, 2018). He secretly dims the gas lights so that she thinks that they dimmed without being touched. Gaslighting includes withholding, countering, blocking/diverting, trivializing, and forgetting/denial. Often a gaslighter will hook the victims

with something that is true. This might look like a gaslighter saying, *Honey, you are so tired today, you must have forgotten that you said you would do the laundry*. Validation of exhaustion could be enough to cause the victim to go do the laundry. A victim might feel that they have trouble making decisions, they might ruminate about their perceived character flaws, they might feel confused about their relationship, it might be very difficult to confront the gaslighter and lead to not feeling heard, and they might just feel fuzzy about thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. Another possibility is that they feel that something is wrong, but they cannot tell what.

Gottmam

Gottman and Gottman's "Four Horsemen" which entail classic relationship destroying elements are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. All of these are strategies employed by those working to maintain power and control. One of Gottman's factors that predict a relationship's demise is the failure of men to accept influence from their female partner. (Gottman & Gottman, 2015).

Triangulation

Another strategy, triangulation, involves bringing an outsider into the relationship to maintain control. Social media has made this strategy possible on a grand scale. Usually, the victim's response to abuse is the subject of triangulation. For example, it is common for the abuser to gain support from outsiders by calling their victim "crazy." This argument can be supported by the angry or distressed reactions to discovering abuses. The narcissist often has no difficulty lying or failing to tell the whole truth of the situation. "Through triangulation, the narcissist controls the content and exchange of communication, takes things out of context, spreads distortions and lies, sets up implied or direct negative comparisons, and instigates rivalries between others" (Hall, 2019, p. 208). One example on social media happens when an

abuser laments publicly that they are not getting enough time with their child because their ex is withholding children. In our culture, any man professing to want *any* time with their kids is applauded. And anti-feminist movements have pointed out times when women's reactions are "over-reactions." Also, women acting strong in any way tends to lead to accusations. Hall (2019) explains that social media is an ideal platform for narcissists to gather supply and to attack others with impunity.

It is a great tragedy when children are brought into triangulation strategies. It is abusive to coerce children into "siding" with either parent against the other. This forces children to go against their attachment needs with one parent to fulfill those with the other. In courts, abusers often accuse their victims of exactly what they are accused of (Campbell, 2017). This creates a huge amount of confusion and "he said, she said" dynamics which often lead to exoneration of the perpetrator. Another form of triangulation is to use a third party to generate jealousy or admiration such as by reporting that someone told the abuser that they were attracted to them. Another form of triangulation is an abuser telling their victim that someone said something negative about them. This might lead to isolation.

Isolation

External relationships pose a threat to the abuser. "One of the most insidious and debilitating aspects of life in a narcissistic home is isolation" (Hall, 2019, p. 187). Maintaining power and control is achieved easily when there are fewer outside influences. Isolating tactics include physical, financial, and emotional strategies. One tactic is to keep their victims so busy with childcare or other activities that there is no time for outside relationships. Another strategy is to move to an area where there are fewer family members or friends. Shaming is another tactic of isolation that is very effective. Jealousy can also lead to isolation. Another form of isolation is

to use surveillance activities. This can be achieved through triangulation, invading privacy such as social media accounts, or setting up cameras. Another form of isolation is elevating "privacy" as a value in the relationship.

Shaming

Ultimately, the narcissist pathologically must project their own shame onto others. They achieve this through tactics too numerous to name. One way that counselors can recognize an abuser in couples therapy is that they are never responsible for any challenges in a relationship. Blame shifting occurs when someone explains that their behavior was caused by someone else's (Hall, 2019). The narcissist can easily gain information about their partner. The expectation of vulnerability in love relationships aids this goal. This information can then be used against their target. A common refrain is, "nobody else will love you." Another way that they induce shame is by being their target's "victim" (Hall, 2019, p.58). This is often a compulsive response to their own childhood wounding. Often a way to spot abuse in a couple is to inquire of the target if they feel like an equal partner in their relationship. The abuser makes a habit of belittling through words, stories, or actions. Decisions that should be made together are often unilateral. Often this is done by elevating certain "ideals." Ideals such as loyalty, never allowing children to use screens, being substance free, being on time, making meals from scratch, or even environmental idealism can all be elevated by the narcissist so that it is easy to shame the target when they fail to uphold perfection. Those in religious systems can find many sources for shaming. "Children of narcissists are most vulnerable to being shamed because they are unformed beings who naturally love their parents and look to them for caregiving, validation of self, and a sense of identity" (Hall, 2019, p. 201).

Using Privilege

As with religious systems, our culture provides many opportunities for the perpetrator to veil their abuse using cultural norms and beliefs. Abusers will exploit using gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status, religion, economic status, physical appearance, or age. It is especially harmful for children to live with abusive parents because of their natural vulnerability and lack of power. Bancroft (2002) writes, "Entitlement is the abuser's belief that he has a special status and that it provides him with exclusive rights and privileges that do not apply to his partner. The attitudes that drive abuse can largely be summarized with this one word" (p. 54).

Physical and Sexual Violence and Threats

Threatening violence or using physical or sexual violence is a typical albeit easily identifiable method of coercive control. Abusers often use physical violence only when they feel desperate. This desperation can be when a source of narcissistic supply gets cut off. This is how to understand the statistic of one woman killed by her intimate partner every eleven minutes (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). However, many abusers maintain power and control by never being culpable for anything as obvious or incriminating as physical violence. Threats can be veiled and difficult to identify by an outsider. A threat could be as subtle as a narcissist spending a lot of time cleaning their guns. A threat can be a look or a cocked fist. A narcissist might threaten to or harm a pet, a child, or even a dream. Even extremely occasional violence can achieve the desired effect: fear. This fear can live on inside a person controlling their behavior leading them to "walk on eggshells" when in the presence of their abuser. This dynamic can be used to identify abuse in therapy. Physical violence is often used in conjunction with gaslighting. Either it was the victim's fault and/or deemed an accident. Sexual abuse is often used in conjunction with the assumption that consent was given with the marriage contract

and that it is the right of the abuser. The loss of sexual health is a common and major impact on victims of narcissistic abuse.

Using Children

Having children can be enormously entrapping for victims of abuse. Their love and need to protect the child is often used by the abuser to build power. This escalation can often be why victims of abuse do not realize until after having children that their partner is abusive. The abuser works to break the bond between mother and child (Hall, 2019). Often abuse escalates in pregnancy. They might shame the mother for any flaw they perceive in their parenting. They might shame the mother for any flaw they perceive in the child and blame this flaw on the mother. There is a whole host of cultural scripts commonly accessed for this type of abuse. An abuser can manipulate their victim into almost anything when they make the welfare of the children the playing chip. Children are not simply witnessing abuse either. They experience it, resist it, and work to minimize the impacts. Children might be told that their mother is crazy. Children's mothers might lose capacity to parent because of the abuse. Mothers might be shamed into discontinuing nursing, letting children "cry it out," or any host of other behaviors that threaten the abuser's entitlement to "narcissistic supply" (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2017).

Impacts

The Department of Justice Canada (2021) reports that it costs $7.4 billion to deal with the aftermath of spousal violence. Victim costs accounted for 80.7% of those costs. These costs include medical costs, lost wages, missed school days, lost property, legal costs, moving expenses, pain and suffering, productivity losses, and mental health issues.

The impacts of abuse reach far and wide into the survivor's life. It is common for women to experience homelessness and poverty after abuse. Survivors often have debt, bad credit rating, housing instability, or they cannot leave the abuser. This can prevent survivors from accessing services, legal help, and from being able to provide for their children's needs. One woman in my support group must hold two jobs to pay for the excessive legal fees incurred by legal abuse. This load prevents her from coping with the emotional and legal impacts of abuse and from being the parent she hopes to be to her five-year-old son.

C-PTSD

van der Kolk (2000) explains how there are some symptoms of continuous or repetitive trauma that are not captured by the DSM-III diagnosis of PTSD. These include affect dysregulation, aggression against self and others, amnesia and dissociation, somatization, depression, distrust, shame, and self-hatred. Dissociation is more likely in cases where the abuse lasted longer (van der Kolk, 2000).

> They often continue to dissociate in the face of threat, suffer from profound feelings of helplessness and have difficulty planning effective action. This makes them vulnerable to develop "emotion-focused coping," a coping style in which the goal is to alter one's emotional state, rather than the circumstances that give rise to those emotional states. This emotion-focused coping accounts for the fact that people who develop PTSD are vulnerable to engage in alcohol and substance abuse. Between a quarter and half of all patients who seek substance abuse treatment suffer from a comorbid PTSD diagnosis. (van der Kolk, 2000, pp. 8-9).

Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD) has not yet earned a place in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) which is commonly used in

North America. However, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) has adopted it as one of its newest disorders. C-PTSD includes the three PTSD criteria of reexperiencing, avoidance, and hypervigilance but add disturbances of self-organization (DSO) which include emotional dysregulation, interpersonal difficulties, and negative self-concept (Jowett et al., 2020). Interestingly, these symptoms overlap significantly with the symptoms of borderline personality disorder, although findings in their study supported a separate diagnosis because there were some differences and variability in overlapping symptoms (Jowett et al., 2020).

Narcissistic Abuse Syndrome

Narcissistic Abuse Syndrome (NAS) is a term coined by psychotherapist Louis de Canonville (2022). She writes that it is the flip side of narcissistic abuse, it consists of the victim's signs and symptoms.

> I liken narcissism to a parasitic worm that manages to penetrate under the skin, where it is out of the sight of witnessing eyes but is free to injure or consume its host slowly, leaving trauma or disease in its wake. By the way, the narcissist can manage to live on inside the victim even after they manage to escape; it is as if their "seed" goes on. (de Canonville, 2022, para. 15)

de Canonville (2022) goes on to explain that often a person who is suffering from NAS will not even know that they are being abused. They might come in for depression, having panic attacks, or feelings that they cannot cope. These clients might appear high strung or nervous, they may have low self-esteem, and high levels of anxiety or fear. They might present with obsessive compulsive behaviours, phobias, panic attacks, insomnia, or eating disorders. Emotions might involve shock, anger, fear, and guilt. PTSD and CPTSD symptoms will be present. They might tend to dissociate. Somatizations and pain are common. They are likely to

demonstrate feelings of shame, humiliation, and self-blame. They may act inferior or powerless or might act with disgust at themselves. The key is to be watchful for a cluster of symptoms.

Physical Impacts

Maté (2022) asks the questions, why do women suffer chronic illness way more than men and why they are far more likely to be diagnosed with mental health conditions.

> Women are more subject to chronic disease even long before old age, and they have more years of poor health and disability . . . women are at much higher risk of suffering chronic pain, migraines, fibromyalgia, irritable bowe syndrome, and autimimune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis . . . Women also have a higher incidence of non-smoking-related malignancies . . . Women also have double men's incidence of anxiety, depression, and PTSD . . . Alzheimer's dementia, too, seems to affect women disproportionately, just as it does Black people in the United States. (Maté, 2022, p.330)

In one study that followed two thousand women over ten years, they found that women who usually or always kept feelings to themselves when in conflict with their spouses, had over four times the risk of dying during the follow-up than those who always showed their feelings (Eaker et al., 2007). Murder is also an impact of abuse. One woman in Canada is killed every six days by her intimate partner (Statistics Canada, 2021). Suicide attempts related to domestic abuse account for over $11 million of costs in Canada in 2009 (Department of Justice Canada, 2010).

In an Australian study, intimate partner violence is responsible for 8% of the total disease burden of women 18-44 years old (Vos et al., 2006). There are direct physical effects of violence and also depression, suicide, suicide attempts, anxiety, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, and adverse maternal and neonatal health outcomes (Ansara & Hindin, 2010).

Children and Youth

Research shows many effects of experiencing violence for children and youth. If children are exposed to violence in the home, they show 10 to 17 times higher rates of serious emotional and behavioural problems than children from non-violent homes (Jaffe et al., 1990). Children and youth might develop PTSD (Lehmann, 1997). They show higher rates of aggression against their mothers, teachers, and friends (Agar, 2004). Commonly, children and youth who have experienced violence in the home experience depression, worry, school refusal, withdrawal from social interaction, and difficulty separating from their mother. Body aches, pains, and illnesses with no known medical causes are common. The Department of Justice (2009) reviewed the literature and adds many far-reaching effects of domestic violence on children. These include but are not limited to infant mortality, adverse neonatal outcomes, impacts to neurocognitive development, negative peer relations, depression, bullying, anxiety, sleep disorders, substance abuse, risk of perpetrating violence, and low educational achievement.

Solutions in Counselling

Feminist Counselling

The examination of gendered power in family therapy first appeared in Hare-Mustin's (1978) critique of systems theory. Interventions based on neutrality were seen as passive agreement with the status quo that disproportionately favored and empowered white, heterosexual, stereotypically gender identifying men (Prouty & Twist, 2015, p.366). "Radical feminists paid most of their attention to gender but also acknowledged that racism (McGoldrick et al., 1989; Pinderhughes, 1986), classism (Kliman, 1998; Laszloffy, 2008; Walsh, 1989), and heterosexism (Laird, 1988) also affected people in couples and families differently, and argued

that overt attention to the origins and outcomes of power dynamics should be incorporated into the therapist's work" (Prouty & Twist, 2016, p. 366).

Education for therapists must focus on gaining "a larger understanding of the complexities of how to respectfully and curiously understand how people's access to power changes based upon not only who they are, but the intersections of who they are and the social context in which they reside" (Prouty & Twist, 2016, p. 376). Radical feminists in family therapy encourage the focus on the dynamics between the couple while promoting egalitarian couple relationships that would include shared parenting, negotiated workloads, and avoidance of mother-blaming and father-praising in therapy (Prouty and Twist, 2016, p. 366). Mother blaming is an especially entrenched cultural force. Mothers are often blamed for not protecting their children while fathers are ignored. "What makes a good father can be as simple as love and provision. What makes a good mother is a mile-long list, full of contradictions, exceptions, and inconsistencies" (Hartley, 2019). "Conjugal violence researchers such as Lapierre (2007, 2008) and Bancroft and Silverman (2002) found that mother-blaming was used by male perpetrators as either a pretext (e.g., bad mothering, bad housekeeping) or that mothers were treated more like co-perpetrators than victims after the fact" (Fast & Richardson, 2019, p. 10). Prouty and Twist (2016) note that it is important for female clients and therapists to learn to recognize themselves as the experts on their own lives. Women are often discouraged from owning expertise and opinions including how it pertains to their children.

Knudson-Martin and Huenergardt (2010) developed a socio-emotional relationship therapy (SERT) that aims for mutual support and egalitarian dynamics in couple therapy. They find that this therapy is especially helpful for "making visible implicit patriarchal discourse in heterosexual relationships" (Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010, p. 371). Instead of masking

power issues such as in traditional therapy, counselors do not remain neutral. Instead, they counteract social inequities. One method is to encourage powerful, male partners to initiate relational connection. One concept that would be especially helpful in the example of separated parents is that both partners must have concern for the relationship. There must be an environment that builds a relational bond so that emotional engagement can be risked. If a parent needs to discuss complex issues pertaining to children with the other parent, it must be okay to discuss feelings and ideas. This model is not specifically designed for separated parents but could be adapted for this situation.

Another model that can be adapted to our example of separated parents is Haddock et al.'s (2000) "Power Equity Guide" (see appendix B) that breaks down different categories such as decision-making, housework, finances, and sex. "The Guide delineates three central goals in the practice of gender-informed family therapy: (a) to eliminate or reduce power differentials between partners, (b) to empower clients to honor and integrate all aspects of themselves, especially those not supported by dominant culture, and (c) to manage the power differential between therapist and clients" (Haddock et al., 2000, pp. 156-157). The Power Equity Scale provides the trainer with a way to scaffold therapists' learning to notice and develop these interpersonal skills (Haddock et al., 2000).

Response-based practice is a social science theory that was developed from research and clinical practice. The theory emphasizes contextual analysis of social interaction to gain understanding of people and their actions (Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007 as cited in Coates & Richardson/Kinewesquao, 2019). Context is discovered through questions such as "Where you live, who is most likely to be accused of a crime they did not commit; and who is most likely to be excused for a crime they did commit, an act that leads to perpetrator impunity?" (Fast &

Richardson, 2019, p.12). The fact that only one percent of sexual assaults lead to conviction is an indicator of the *context* of our culture (Fast & Richardson, 2019).

Despite Bancroft's and others' warnings that couple therapy in cases of abuse is not helpful, new research shows that several forms of couples' treatment and multi-couple group treatment appear to be more effective than gender-based models (Stith et al., 2012 as cited in Gerhart, 2018). The researchers note it is important to screen for the couples where the abuser does not have severe pathology or antisocial characteristics. Only the mild cases of family-only battering can be helped in couples therapy (Stith et al., 2002 as cited in Gerhart, 2018). Dytch (n.d.) agrees that past abuse must be mild and both partners must commit to a contract of no further abuse to be treated together. The abused partner must be safe, unafraid, and resourced. This is more likely when the partners are separated.

Power Threat Meaning Framework

Emerging in 2018, the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF) was designed to be a meta-framework that offers an alternative to the medical model of distress. Distress, troubling behaviors, and other mental health presentations can be attributed to the individual's social environment and the power systems that have threatened core needs. It sees humans as agents who have reasons for their actions. "Judgements about who is deemed to be 'mad' are inevitably, to some extent, based on implicit norms about what are acceptable ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving in a given society" (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018, p. 8). The PTMF has implications for gaining perspectives that will allow for compassion and growth in a clinical counselling setting. The implications also reach far beyond counselling into allowing narratives of self-compassion for suffering individuals, for those with the power to change to understand and study what is wrong, and in working towards a culture that helps rather than further traumatizes those in need.

The Power Threat Meaning Framework conceptualizes "symptoms" as a natural response to power dynamics in a human's life. We all share certain core needs such as our physiological needs, those for safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. A threat is when one of these core needs is at risk. Our threat responses are strategies used to get these needs met. The symptoms for both diagnoses of C-PTSD and NPD are a list of strategies used to get needs met.

Gottman

"Statistically speaking, when a man is not willing to share power with his partner there is an 81 percent chance that his marriage will self-destruct" (Gottman, 2015, p. 269). Gottman's (2015) "love lab" has provided humanity with some actual answers to a highly complex question: what makes or breaks a romantic relationship. Gottman (2015) claims divorce can be predicted by the presence of six signs. Harsh start up (1) includes beginning a conversation with criticism, negativity, or contempt. 96% of the time, you can predict the outcome of a conversation based on the first three minutes of the fifteen-minute interaction. The Four Horseman (2) include criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Instead of a complaint, which discusses specifically what happened, discusses needs, and ends with a request (like in non-violent communication), criticism tends to turn a complaint into an accusation often utilizing "always and never" words. Contempt reflects a sense of superiority over one's partner and can include sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, and mockery. Couples who often express contempt towards each other are more likely to suffer from illnesses than other people. Defensiveness is blame in disguise and another way to claim oneself to be "an innocent victim." Stonewalling usually arrives later when one partner finally gives up and tunes out. Flooding (3) can be measured by a nervous system response. When one partner gets flooded by the other's

criticisms, the reaction is often to avoid conflict at all costs. Body language (4) is simply a sign of flooding. Gottman claims that simply watching the heart rate and blood pressure of partners during arguments can be used to predict if "flooding" is present and if that couple is likely to divorce. The fifth sign is failed repair attempts which operate in a feedback loop with the horsemen. The sixth sign is bad memories which consume the relationship in negativity.

Gottmans' (2015) research is relevant to narcissistic partner abuse because it illustrates strategies that are often used by narcissists, provides a pathway to identify the mechanisms of abuse in a counselling session, and the flooding can be helpful to understand the physiological effects of the victim that might be used to predict an ongoing pattern. This research also offers better alternatives such as "bids for connection" and "let your partner influence you" which could be helpful in recognizing what could be done better and exactly how and why narcissistic strategies fail.

Non-Violent Communication

Rosenberg (2005) explains how language reflects culture and that our culture has been one that has used power and control regularly in its institutions. One way that language does this is that it shows that English speakers can hide the truth that no one has the power to make anyone else feel any way because we often use the words, "you make me feel…" Rosenberg offers an alternative to this form of communication and a possible way to rise above our culture of blame and shame cycles. This includes separating observation from assessment, then using universal feelings and needs to communicate, and replacing demands with requests. This type of communication is critical when working with all clients as a counsellor but could be especially healing for victims of narcissistic abuse. It could also be a route to help the abuser to see what needs underlie their behaviors.

Trauma Informed

A trauma informed perspective includes being aware of the cultural forces in a person's life. This means that we understand deeply how power imbalances within a relationship, culture, or family can lead to distress, helplessness, and trauma. Trauma informed means "to recognize the impact of violence and victimization on development and coping strategies" (Butler et al., 2011, p.178). This includes refraining from pathologizing individuals who are suffering. To be trauma informed also seeks to recognize how easily a counsellor in a position of power over their client could contribute to trauma or inadvertently retraumatize a victim. In the case of victims of narcissistic partner abuse, there are many ways that a counselor could be sensitive to contributing to trauma. One is to not focus on "change work" with this client as this could exacerbate the trauma of their partner constantly telling them that they are not good enough. Another is to avoid taking power away or highlighting feelings of helplessness. Instead, the focus should be on strengths, helping the client to feel safe, minimizing the power imbalances of therapist to client, and working towards client empowerment.

Screening for Narcissistic Abuse/ Identifying Power Imbalances

Carlson, a licensed counselor who conducts trainings for mental health professionals to understand domestic violence says, "We assume when there's violence in a couple's relationship, they will tell us [in counseling]. What I've learned is if we don't ask the right questions, they won't tell us, and you shouldn't ask those questions if you're not ready for their disclosure" (Bray, 2019, para. 4). He says the situation can get emotionally charged quickly and put the victim at risk.

It can be difficult to discern from the perpetrator if they are abusive. There are a few hints such as jealousy, admitting that they can lose their temper, and claiming that they are abused.

One way to investigate further according to Bancroft (2002) is to ask questions about their partner's perspective or complaints. Shaw (2014) explains that an abuser could be a member of the partnership who claims no responsibility for the problems in the relationship.

Hall (2019) discusses how victims might be unaware of the abuse, might be too unsafe to leave their state of denial, might be trauma bonded, might believe the abuse is their fault, or be too codependent to identify abuse. Trauma bonding is a condition where the push and pull of idealizing and devaluation creates an addiction to reward. The erosion of self-confidence, isolation, and threat leads victims to physiologically be trapped in relationship to their abuser. Dytch (n.d.) also points out that often the victim does not know that she is abused. She might have been convinced by her partner that she brought the mistreatment upon herself. There are some questions that are helpful to ask the potential victim of abuse. Instead of asking, *has your partner physically assaulted you?* Ask: *are you afraid of your partner?* Fear is one of the most common tools of an abuser. Also, some questions relating to the past relationship can be telling. These might include, *Did you feel you had to walk on eggshells when he was around*, or *What happened when you brought up your concerns with his behaviour or the relationship*. Abusers often minimize, deny, and distort to avoid accountability.

It is so important for counselors to understand the nature of abusive relationships. One key factor is understanding that abuse does not only refer to physical violence (Bray, 2019). Cameron lists a bunch of signs he uses to determine if power and control were a concern in a relationship such as if the client feels isolated from friends and family, if one partner is the sole decision-maker, or if a partner exhibits extreme jealousy (Bray, 2019). Dytch (n.d.) explains that people in abusive relationships often present as typical clients with communication, stress, intimacy, and disagreement issues. The key is in looking for control dynamics such as one

partner always starting the session or using silence, intimidation, or manipulation. Frequently both partners appear to be highly defensive. He explains that it is important to meet with each client separately to adequately screen for abuse.

Some evaluative tools to help therapists identify power discrepancies are the Feminist Family Therapy Scale by Black and Piercy (1991); the *Feminist Family Therapy Checklist* by Chaney and Piercy (1988); the *Feminist Couple Therapy Scale* by McGeorge, Carlson, and Toomey (2015b) or the *Power and Control Wheel* (see appendix B). (Prouty & Twist, 2016). Dytch, (n.d.) developed an *Abusive Behavior Inventory* that helps identify abusive behavior with items such as "prevent from receiving medical care," "treat partner as less than your equal," and "drive recklessly to frighten." After determining if there is abuse, the counselor must decide if they can help, and if so, develop a strategy.

Counselling the Abuser

Healing the abuser of controlling behaviors could do the greatest good for victims and future victims. Despite heated debate about whether a narcissist or sociopath can change, it is not helpful to auger into the belief that change is impossible. Also, it is not therapeutic for anyone to use labels or pathologizing language. Also, punishing the abuser will only further justify using punishment or control as a strategy.

Often when people use ineffective strategies to get their needs met, education can help. Education about patriarchy and control are necessary. Education about the value of a positive co-parenting relationship could be a key motivator and one that is noted in the Socio-Emotional Relationship Therapy (SERT) (Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010). Another motivator would likely be that the abuser does not like having a parenting coordinator with power over

him. It could help to normalize “abusive behavior” by explaining patriarchy and privilege. This could help the abuser to accept and admit to their behavior.

The therapist must be aware of narcissistic strategies used in session. Understanding the four horsemen, gaslighting, and being cautious to not play into fantasies of self will all be useful tools for the therapist (Gottman,2015). If any coercive or manipulative strategies are used in therapy, it could be a great opportunity for intervention and reflection. Teaching non-violent communication and the principles behind it could be a tool to help with self-empathy and compassion for others (Rosenberg, 2005).

Narcissism is a problem of low self-worth (Hall, 2019). Once there is some acceptance or acknowledgement of their behavior, the client could work to discover the root of this sensation and help develop an awareness of the needs associated with abusive behaviors. If it is possible to get to a stage of self-awareness, trauma informed care will be critical (see section on counselling the victim).

Bancroft (2002) believes that there are four necessary elements to bringing about change in an abuser. These include consequences, education, confrontation, and accountability. Dytch (n.d.) agrees that accountability is critical. It is important that the partner of the abuser is contacted on an ongoing basis to provide accountability. He believes that a batterer intervention program is better than therapy. Bancroft (2002) admits that many abusers choose not to continue in abuser programs. Klein (2009) points out that overall, unless batterer intervention programs are closely monitored and program compliance is mandated, these programs might be ineffective and give false hope to victims. This is because those who do not finish the programs are on average twice as likely to re-offend than those who do complete the programs and noncompletion rates range from 25 to 89%.

The Duluth Model is described as the most common model used worldwide (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, 2017). Developed in Minnesota in the 1970s, it stems from a feminist perspective. Criticisms of this model include that it uses confrontation as a change strategy as opposed to therapeutic alliance. There are also some that criticize the feminist underpinnings because they do not agree that violence is gendered (Brown et al., 2016).

The Caledonian model, developed in Scotland runs for two years. It uses the feminist model (and the psychopathology model) to look at how men are socialized to use control under our system of patriarchy (Hill, 2020). It uses a "systems" approach and provides services for all family members. It works with men's strengths and what constitutes a "good life." The Scottish Government (2016) did a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and found a reduction in risk of partner violence.

A study by Monash University found that 65% of men report being violence free or almost violence free two years after behaviour change programs (Brown et al., 2016). This study followed 300 men in Australia who participated in twelve different programs.

Counselling the Victim

The victim of coercive control needs a trauma informed approach (Bray, 2019). It is critical to avoid working on how they caused the abuse, what is wrong with them to put them in this situation, or in any other way make them feel responsible for their abuse (Bray, 2019). This is victim blaming. "Victims of abuse often adopt patterns and behaviors that are the best choices they can make in a bad situation" (Bray, 2019). A common misconception is that a victim should already have left their abuser. It is never that simple. Often abuse escalates after separation (See Appendic C: Post Separation Power and Control Wheel) (Bray, 2019).It is helpful to provide education on coercive control, narcissism, nervous system reactions, and

trauma reactions so that they can better understand what happened to them. It is helpful to grow support systems, self-care, and self-compassion. Identifying strengths will help clients move into a healing phase. Another strategy could be to rediscover interests and the things that give them joy.

The peer support group that I facilitate has shown me how important it is to focus on practical needs. It is helpful to be able to provide many resources depending on the needs of the client. These might include a safety plan or template for creating one, a list of tested lawyers who understand coercive control, a framework and protocol for developing a separation agreement, and local resources for childcare, funding, or other supports. They might need assistance understanding how to find a shelter, choose a good lawyer, suggestions on how to "parallel parent," techniques to avoid further conflict with their abuser such as "the grey rock technique," and understanding the legal implications and situations they might encounter. In Canada, this means understanding what a "section 211" means, what "parenting coordinators" can do (and also how they can sometimes perpetuate harm), and what an F8 form is. They also might need financial planning support. I have attached a working document (see Appendix A) that I have created with my peer support group to provide to other people in need.

The power threat meaning framework (PTMF) advocates a counselling approach that expands upon trauma-informed care. These principles include safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and awareness of cultural, historical, and gender issues. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). The counsellor approaches the client as a collaborator who works on skills rather than focusing on illness and symptoms. Instead of wondering what is wrong with a client, the counsellor wonders what happened to a client. (Blue

Knot Foundation, 2012). The Power Threat Meaning Framework expands this last approach into six main questions:

- ‘What has happened to you?’ (How has Power operated in your life?)
- ‘How did it affect you?’ (What kind of Threats does this pose?)
- ‘What sense did you make of it?’ (What is the Meaning of these situations and experiences to you?)
- ‘What did you have to do to survive?’ (What kinds of Threat Response are you using?)
- ‘What are your strengths?’ (What access to Power resources do you have?)
- …and to integrate all the above: ‘What is your story?’ (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018, p. 280).

The counselor approaches the client aware of the prevalence and impact of adversities. The counsellor is encouraged to challenge the discrimination, inequality, and socioeconomic structures that create distress in individuals.

Important factors for counselling victims revolve around doing no harm and addressing inequities. This is an opportunity for the victim to learn how to name abuse and call it out. It is critical to model extreme respect and close listening to help counteract the loss of this with her co-parent. If the victim is still with the abuser, it is very important not to rush ending the relationship. There are many delicate factors to consider and manage before leaving a coercive controller is safe. Many physical and mental health impacts result from this type of abuse (Brayu, 2019). It is important to help your clients recognize what these might be and help connect them to medical professionals that can help. Making a list of trauma informed doctors, avoiding talk of resiliency and instead using the paradigm of resistance to reframe the responses to abuse will allow for developing self-compassion rather than deepening isolation and shame.

At the most basic level, the counselor is a witness. The victims will gain power by having a witness who can testify in court. Both partners will have a witness to their conversations about the children which will hold them accountable. The simple presence of an abuse informed witness will motivate both parties to show respect, to put the children first, and follow guidelines that are pre-set for communication such as "emails only no texts." This witness could contribute to the safety of the abused and the children. They must report if they suspect a child could be harmed through physical violence, neglect, or sexual abuse. Also, if a counselor suspects an imminent risk of serious bodily harm to the client or anyone else, the counselor must report this to the authorities. Another hope is that the witness counselor can also be an agent of Lynn Hoffman's "withness" for those who feel powerless (Kinman, 2017).

When the client has achieved a more stable situation, there are a few more interventions that might help. One is to name all of the losses associated with the trauma. This might include the loss of hopes and dreams, the loss of financial stability, the loss of friends, the loss of health, and all the other subtle and not so subtle losses. When losses are validated and recognized, then the normal human grieving process can commence. David Puder (2018) uses polyvagal theory to address healing from anything including grief that would help someone out of a dorsal vagal state. The solution is to help them into a ventral vagal state by "bringing someone into healthy social engagement, or proper attachment" (Puder, 2018, para. 53). These are the steps: 1) have a trust-based relationship. This means that you do not bring up traumatic events until therapeutic relationship connection is deep. 2) Find your own calm center. The therapist must stay in the moment knowing that the human experience is so powerful that when we re-engage the trauma with someone to support us, it rewrites that event in our brain. 3) Let the patient lead. It can be harmful to prompt the patient or ask leading questions for a confession. 4) Normalize their

response. 5) Help them find their anger. “Anger shows us where our healthy boundaries were crossed. Anger brings them out of dissociation, even if it is anger at you, the therapist” (Puder, 2018, para 82). 6) Introduce body movement. Reconnect the body and mind by reactivating body movements while talking about the trauma. 7) Practice assertiveness. Emotional shutdown occurs when a relationship is imbalanced. 8) Breath work, mindfulness, and yoga. 9) Become a Judo Master and practice strength training (Puder, 2018). Rosenberg (2016) discusses manual ways of achieving the ventral vagal state in *Accessing the healing power of the vagus nerve: Self-help exercises for anxiety, depression, trauma, and autism*. This includes gently stimulating the nerves desired for social engagement. One such exercise, “the basic exercise,” involves lying down with the fingers intertwined behind the skull while moving the eyes one way until release and then the other (Rosenberg, 2016). This supports the theory posited in *The Body Keeps the Score*, where van der Kolk (2015) explains that the mind and body are inextricably linked. Levine (1977, 1997) explains that a trauma is an event that causes long-term dysregulation in the nervous system. Levine developed a therapy over the course of his lifetime called “Somatic Experiencing” that uses the physical body to address trauma. This could be a great option for sufferers of narcissistic abuse.

Fisher (2017) offers a compassionate method of working through trauma in her book *Healing the fragmented selves of trauma survivors overcoming internal self-alienation*. Fisher, a colleague of van der Kolk, found that it can be helpful for trauma survivors to work with various parts of themselves that might have had to break off from the self in response to the trauma. She explains the dissociative effects of trauma and how to work towards integration.

Counselling Children and Youth Who Experience Violence

Talk therapy could have limited value for some children. Counselling the caregivers will provide the greatest benefit in certain circumstances. Exploring play therapy, dance therapy, or music therapy could all be tools to use with children of families dealing with abuse. A primary objective is to provide a safe relationship (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2021). Counselors can lead the client to understand that the behaviors of a parent are not their fault. They also need to learn that it is not their job to protect a parent. Strategies for finding safety or feeling safe might also be used to help a child in certain situations. Helping the client to find their strengths and feel empowered are also helpful. Another topic would be to discuss what a healthy relationship looks like. This must be done delicately because it is important that the parents are not put down, blamed, or disrespected (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2021).

Response-Based Practice

Kinewesquo and Bonnah (2015) explain how important it is to acknowledge and examine children's resistance. One reason for this is to honour their dignity. Our culture pathologizes children rather than noticing that their behavior is often in response or resistance to distressing circumstances. Children used to be described as "witnessing" violence in their homes. After examining actual cases, "experiencing" has emerged as a better word. Children work to minimize violence. Children need respect, to be heard, and to have their feelings validated.

It is important that children and youth receive a positive social response when they disclose violence. A positive response consists of stopping the violence, making the child safe, not devastating the family, and restoring the child's faith in adults (Kinewesquo & Bonnah, 2015). It is critical not to question the child's story (Thulin et al., 2020). Disclosures can be facilitated through learning about children's rights and abusive behaviors in school. Schools can also help by providing education to teachers to aid in their responses to disclosures. Many

children and youth find comfort in learning that the abuse was not their fault. It is also important that the child or youth be fully informed and consulted about what will be done following disclosure.

Counselling Relationship

Therapists must work on their relationship to the client and to the world to fulfill the call of radical feminists. “Feminists emphasized perpetual self-assessment of personal biases, privilege, and inexperience of human cultural diversity and of the monitoring of countertransference” (Hays, 1996: Long, 2003; Perlman, 1996: Pinderhughes, 2002 as cited in Prouty& Lyness, 2011, p. 274). Therapists must continually reassess their assumptions and values about gender. They must maintain a relationship with clients not as powerful “expert” but as a support who is likely to make mistakes and perpetuate biases. They also must disclose their own gender biases and values. They will gain trust by admitting their mistakes.

The counselors who work with parents would not have any additional or instant power to make decisions that are binding. They would not operate alone in cases of moderate to severe abuse. A counselor will need to have a supervisor or peer to follow up with to help the counsellor navigate the complexities of these situations. Courts and law enforcement will still have a role to play although hopefully a smaller one.

Solutions Beyond Counselling

Laws

Tasmania, England, Wales, and Scotland have all criminalized coercive control. (Barlow &Walklate, 2021). In Canada, a 2021 amendment to the Divorce Act introduced definitions of family violence to the legislation, including a specific mention of coercive and controlling behaviours, which may include specific acts that are not criminal but is a pattern of abusive

behaviours designed to control or dominate another (Department of Justice 2021). In a brief to the House of Commons, Silverstone (2020) writes:

> For those whose sense of personal agency has been taken away, without a fist ever being raised, narrow definitions of violence can lead to victims feeling like they cannot express their pain or access treatment because their experiences of violence do not fit into what society typically defines as such. The impacts of coercive control on individuals violates "human rights that are protected by The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Canada's Human Rights Act, which protect equality rights, freedom of expression, rights to be free from harassment, and rights to live a life with dignity (p. 1).

Police Response

Barlow and Walklate (2021) found that police officers understand risk through an incident and physical violence-focussed approach (the here and now). This means that they might have trouble identifying and assessing risk of coercive control. Recommendations made by the National Institute of Justice in the United States include for law enforcement to have specialized domestic violence units as they significantly increase the likelihood of prosecution, conviction, and sentencing. In the United States, only 11% of police departments have specialized domestic violence units. Klein (2009) also recommends that coordinated community responses should be created because they have a positive impact on both case processing and re-abuse. The primary aggressor must be identified by law enforcement because often the victim fights back and is also guilty of violence. Both parties should be separated immediately so that more accurate accounts can be determined. Wood and Griffin (2021) explored the research of

many domestic violence situations and found that there are good reasons to combine law enforcement and public health organizations.

The Legal System

Klein (2009) has many recommendations for prosecutors and judges including that non-compliance with court orders must have rapid consequences, specialized domestic violence courts help victims in myriad ways, and judges should be educated and insist on finding patterns of abuse rather than a single incident. Legal abuse also must be identified and stopped. Lawyers need to be trauma informed so that they can work with victims without adding to their trauma. The law needs to be improved so that coercive control can be prosecuted. Narcissistic strategies must be understood by the entire system.

Banks

Banks, as institutions, could do a lot to prohibit financial abuse. Instead, banks perpetuate and further frustrate those suffering from financial abuse. Financial abuse is sometimes the reason that partners cannot leave their abusers. Australia and the United Kingdom's banking sectors have initiated guidelines and codes of conduct to address financial abuse (Press, 2022). Banks could provide accessible and free credit repair, they could educate themselves, provide trauma informed staff, they could produce education about financial abuse and ways to prevent and identify when it is occurring to their clients. Banks could also do more to help survivors re-gain control of their finances. Banks could have ways to prevent someone under court order to follow the regulations such as when they are not allowed to withdraw from an account. In Australia, one guideline is to change joint account authorities, at the request of one party, for all to approve of withdrawals (Australian Banking Association, 2021).

Education

All school systems should educate children about domestic abuse (Ofsted et al., 2017) and other systemic phenomena (racism, sexism, classism, ablism, etc.) to help students to learn about how culture plays an important role in their individual lives. Students are educated in how to cope with or identify "stranger danger," "inappropriate touching," and "bullying." It would not be hard to also teach about what a respectful relationship looks like or the subtle patterns of abuse. Teachers should be educated about how to recognize signs of children who are experiencing domestic violence in the home. Prevention programs are more effective when promoted through whole-school policies and practices (Harne & Radford, 2008). Learning about non-violent communication and enacting it in classrooms has had great success in helping students to cope with conflict (Rosenberg, 2005). Learning about the Four Horsemen through exercises and play could also help. One of the best ways to enact cultural change is to change the way that we indoctrinate and teach children. Schooling principles and policy should be ahead of the curve. We can start with treating all children no matter what their behavior, challenges, or appearances are as equally important, beautiful, and worthy. We can teach children how to love themselves simply by demonstrating good relating. We can forgo our patriarchal strategies of rewards and punishments for a more life affirming style of motivating learning. We can empower girls by offering them equal respect as boys. We can help boys by not requiring that they conform to the rigid gender roles that our culture demands of boys and men. "The ways in which gender violence is based on and reinforced through women's wider structural inequality and lack of power in relation to men needs to be recognized if violence within the domestic sphere is to be tackled effectively" (Lloyd, 2018, para. 40).

Awareness

For culture to truly evolve, it must take root in the ground. We cannot only change laws because often the course of systemic thinking goes so much deeper than the legal system. For many women, the laws that are meant to protect them are not enforced. Change occurs when we tell stories. Change occurs when we recognize that we had a belief that cannot be true. Change occurs when we understand that the story is more complex than we had previously thought. Change is hard, but it is inevitable. The “Me Too” movement and “Black lives matter” have helped to generate important conversations that shed light on patterns of abuse. Confronting violence and not being afraid to examine and expose the gendered nature of violence is a critical first step. Another step is to listen to and stop pathologizing victims. The other side of control is fear. We must confront the fear and control in our personal lives as this could be the internalized version of our culture’s violence and oppression.

Chapter 3: Conclusion and Discussion

As counsellors, we have so many opportunities to help those in need. However, we also have the power to further traumatize those who are already suffering. Situations of domestic violence where the abuse is covert and under the radar are especially tricky for counsellors. If I simply followed my training, I would likely not be able to discern most situations of abuse and might perpetuate the violence unwittingly. Therapists have historically contributed to pathologizing victims in myriad ways. One way that we do this is by focusing on change work and resilience. Instead, we must commit to advocacy for social change, we must name abuse patterns, we must avoid pathologizing individuals, and commit to walking side by side with our clients.

Surprisingly, this exploration has forced me to visit my own life and childhood but also those of my mother, father, and grandparents. My mother's mission borne out of her first career as a midwife to support mothers so that we can support our culture's children is the overarching conclusion of this paper. We seem to understand through the hard work of Bessel Van Der Kolk, Peter Levine, Judith Herman, Gabor Maté, and others that trauma is often rooted in childhood because of the unique state of powerlessness, theta brain waves, and needs for attachment and feeling good that occurs at the start of human life. Yet, we take an enormously blasé cultural approach to protecting children from this trauma.

My main concern is the lack of support, honour, and assistance that we give mothers or other primary caregivers and attachment providers for children. In fact, the cultural forces operating on mothers often put us in a vice. We are constantly choosing between impossible situations. Either we get an education, or we go on welfare and actually attend to our children. Either we divorce our narcissist or provide what our culture says is best for children: a two-

parent home. Either we stay with the husband to protect our children from them or leave and lose that ability in any case where he might have custody.

We could try to use a legal system, but it often does not serve us as the laws, access, and costs are prohibitive. Often lawyers perpetuate the abuse through victim blaming attitudes. Do we call the cops and risk escalating violence or do we soothe our abuser so that our children remain safe? “The burdens placed on women in patriarchal cultures, and the ways these curtail and constrain women’s prospects for authentic self-realization, have long been recognized” (Maté, 2022, p. 336). Maté (2022) explains that there is a “health gender gap” where women in our culture experience more chronic disease and have more years of poor health and disability. He links all of these diseases with emotional disturbances that lead to inflammation. He writes, “what burdens, what stresses, could women of any color and class share with Black people as a group? To me the answer is clear: they are both especially targeted by a culture that does not honor but demeans, distorts, and even impels people to suppress who they are” (Maté, 2022, p. 331). Maté (2022) asks, “What if our intention, as parents, as educators, as a society, was to raise children in touch with their feelings, authentically empowered to express them, to think independently and be prepared to act on behalf of their principles?” (Maté, 2022, p. 491).

How would it look different than our society today? I would have recognized abuse in my own life sooner because the abuse of my past would have been acknowledged, validated, and dealt with by responsible adults. The moment a child is conceived, the burden of that child most often falls to the mother. If we could find a way to hold not just pregnancy and the first year of life sacred, but all of childhood, we must find a way to support these women. As it stands, our patriarchal culture devalues the burden of child rearing. Too many work cultures do not allow women to adequately prioritize their children’s needs. Too little cultural support and awareness

leads to stressed out and traumatized fathers who do not realize that they could do so much more to help their children: not just by supporting their children directly, but by supporting their children's mother. If mothers are supported, men also will benefit. Our culture might evolve to one of compassion from one of competition. We might learn to incorporate the power of love rather than crumple into the love of power. The positive spiral that would result would reach far and wide.

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Appendix A

Summary of Resources from Wonder Women: A working document

- **Lawyers**
    - Liana Self- “way better than Sean Jones”
    - Rich Toewes: “really expensive but great reputation”
    - Angela Thiele- “fierce fighter for those who have been abused”
    - Inga Phillips
    - Gita Gill
    - Karen Redmoond- a bad lawyer
    - Nikki Charlton- “apparently very good, hard assed Lawyer”
- **Parenting Coordinators**
    - Kelly-Anne Breen
- **Psychologists for section 211**
    - Ashley Heiner: “great, thorough” http://www.drashleyheiner.com/
- **RCMP**
    - Constable Gerard “doesn’t understand kids”
    - Cst. Christine Robinson is great: the investigator for our domestic violence unit
    - Cst Stacey Wilkinson- they work with Victim Services
- **Local Resources**
    - Peace Program at Howe Sound Women’s Centre- free counseling for kids
    - Dr. Lisa Ferrari: https://www.drlisaferrari.com/ She does divorce coaching and works towards the “childs best interest”
    - Allison Jones and Associates: Specialize in high conflict management

    - Margery Healey PCI Certified Parent Coach

      www.TheCompassionateParentCoach.com

      connect@thecompassionateparentcoach.com 604.329.0865

- **Safety Plan Links**
    - https://mylawbc.com/pathways/safety-plan
- **Podcasts**
    - Narcissistic Abuse Recovery Podcast
    - High Conflict Co-parenting
    - Out of Crazytown: https://outofcrazytown.podbean.com/e/nail-your-custody-evaluation-renee-rodriguez-custody-coach-and-consultant/
    - I'm a Survivor Podcast: https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/im-a-survivor-podcast/id1452383423?i=1000538491260
- **Books**
    - Why Does He Do That? By Lundy Bancroft
    - When Dad Hurts Mom by Lundy Bancroft
    - Out of the Fog by Dana Morningstar
    - Splitting by Eddy and Kreger
    - Divorcing a Narcissist One Mom's Battle by Tina Swithin
    - Mindful Self-Compassion by Neff
- **Other Resources**
    - https://www.highconflictinstitute.com/- trainings for counselors, and consultation for organizations and individuals

- Book by Bill Eddy: BIFF- Brief, Informative, friendly, and firm (or neutral instead of friendly)
- One Mom's Battle: https://www.onemomsbattle.com/. So full of great information. One is "canned responses"
- "When Dad Hurts Mom"
- Attending a Judicial Settlement Conference/ How to Separate: https://www.howtoseparate.ca/9-court-process/919-attending-judicial-settlement-conference
- The Horn Model: https://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/images/1/10/Guardianship_-_Horn_Model.pdf
- Legal Abuse https://family.legalaid.bc.ca/abuse-family-violence/it-abuse/if-your-spouse-harassing-you-through-courts, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11025_10 (section 220)
- https://family.legalaid.bc.ca/abuse-family-violence/it-abuse: legal aid BC is a great resource for safety plans, how to file court orders, how to get a protection order, and generally how BC law can help
- Peaceful Parent App: https://www.peacefulparentapp.com/ this allows users to set limits on how many words can be sent in a text, time of day you want to receive texts, and keeps a record of all interactions that are easily printable
- Grey Rock Technique: https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/toxic-relationships/201911/the-price-and-payoff-gray-rock-strategy
- Bill Eddy: youtube: How to Spot High Conflict People

- https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-supreme-court-says-one-incident-of-family-violence-may-justify-childs/
- Deductibility of Legal Fees Incurred to Claim or Collect Support: https://goldwaterdube.com/en/faqs/deductibility-legal-fees-incurred-claim-or-collect-support
- https://gen.medium.com/rage-becomes-her-why-women-dont-get-to-be-angry-b2496e9d679d
- https://tappingdetective.com/
- https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/man-s-abusive-texts-to-former-spouse-amount-to-family-violence-against-their-daughter-b-c-judge-1.6328502
- Talking Parents App

Definitions:

What is an F8 (from: https://family.legalaid.bc.ca/bc-legal-system/legal-forms-documents/filling-out-court-forms/complete-supreme-court-financial#0)

A Supreme Court Financial Statement (Form F8) is a document that tells the judge or master about your income, expenses, assets, and debts. Fill out this form if:

- There's a claim for **spousal** or **child** support against you.
- You're claiming spousal support.
- You're claiming child support and any of the following apply:
  - You're claiming an amount other than the amount set out in the child support tables.
  - You're claiming for special expenses.

- The child support is for stepchildren.
- At least one of the children for whom you're claiming support is 19 or over.
- Each parent has, or is applying for, at least 40 percent of the parenting time.
- Each parent has, or is applying to have, one child primarily in the care of one parent and another child primarily in the care of the other parent.
- The person being asked to pay child support makes more than $150,000 a year.
- Either spouse is claiming undue hardship.

- There's an application to set aside or replace all or any part of an agreement that deals with child support.

What is Section 211 (from https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11025_10)

211 (1)

A court may appoint a person to assess, for the purposes of a proceeding under Part 4 *[Care of and Time with Children]*, one or more of the following:(a)

the needs of a child in relation to a family law dispute;(b)

the views of a child in relation to a family law dispute;(c)

the ability and willingness of a party to a family law dispute to satisfy the needs of a child.(2)

A person appointed under subsection (1)(a)

must be a family justice counsellor, a social worker or another person approved by the court, and(b)

unless each party consents, must not have had any previous connection with the parties.(3)

An application under this section may be made without notice to any other person.(4)

A person who carries out an assessment under this section must(a)

prepare a report respecting the results of the assessment,(b)

unless the court orders otherwise, give a copy of the report to each party, and(c)

give a copy of the report to the court.(5)

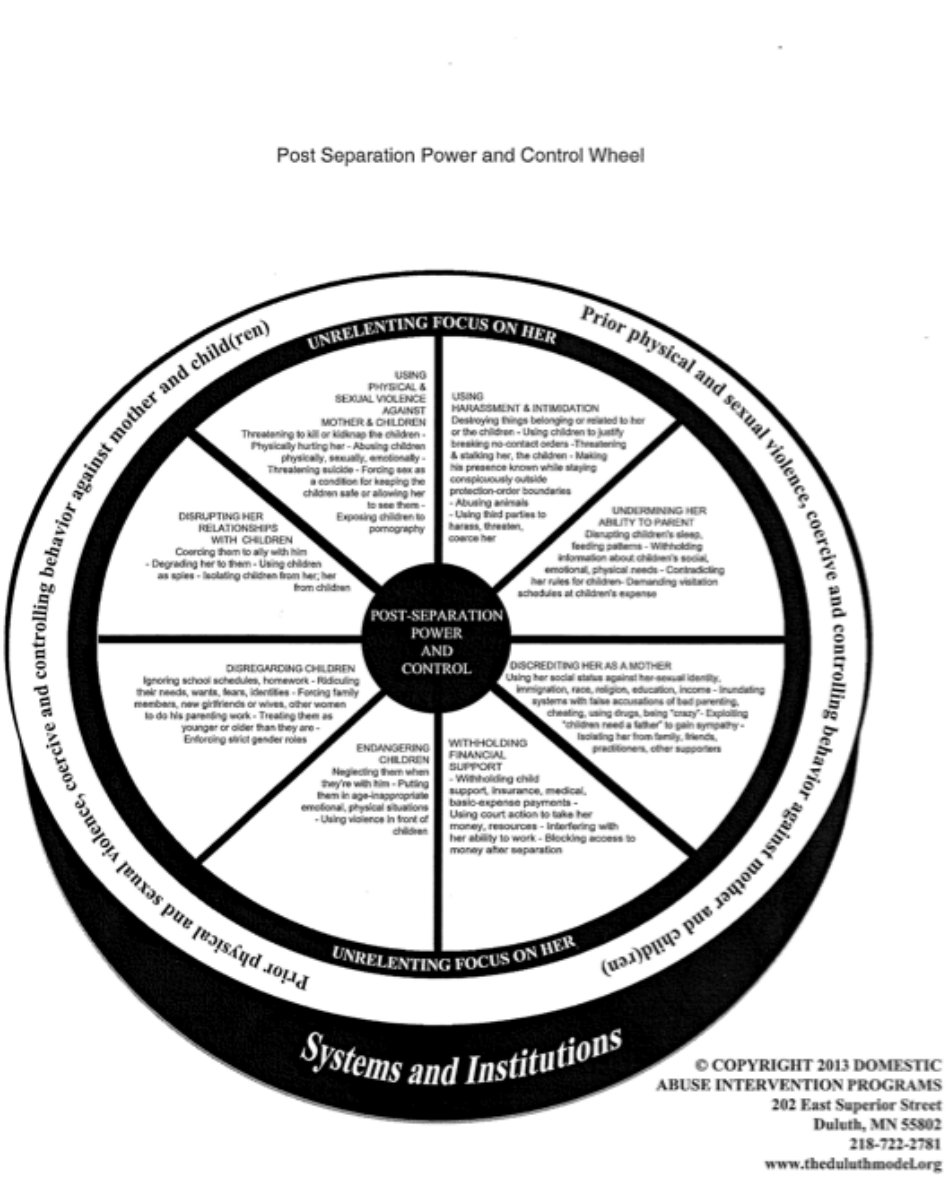
The court may allocate among the parties, or require one party alone to pay, the fees relating to an assessment under this section.

Appendix B

The Duluth Model

DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781
www.theduluthmodel.org

Appendix C


Post Separation Power and Control Wheel
UNRELENTING FOCUS ON HER
Prior physical and sexual violence, coercive and controlling behavior against mother and child(ren)
USING PHYSICAL & SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MOTHER & CHILDREN
Threatening to kill or kidnap the children - Physically hurting her - Abusing children physically, sexually, emotionally - Threatening suicide - Forcing sex as a condition for keeping the children safe or allowing her to see them - Exposing children to pornography
USING HARASSMENT & INTIMIDATION
Destroying things belonging or related to her or the children - Using children to justify breaking no-contact orders -Threatening & stalking her, the children - Making his presence known while staying conspicuously outside protection-order boundaries - Abusing animals - Using third parties to harass, threaten, coerce her
DISRUPTING HER RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN
Coercing them to ally with him - Degrading her to them - Using children as spies - Isolating children from her; her from children
UNDERMINING HER ABILITY TO PARENT
Disrupting children's sleep, feeding patterns - Withholding information about children's social, emotional, physical needs - Contradicting her rules for children- Demanding visitation schedules at children's expense
POST-SEPARATION POWER AND CONTROL
DISREGARDING CHILDREN
Ignoring school schedules, homework - Ridiculing their needs, wants, fears, identities - Forcing family members, new girlfriends or wives, other women to do his parenting work - Treating them as younger or older than they are - Enforcing strict gender roles
DISCREDITING HER AS A MOTHER
Using her social status against her-sexual identity, immigration, race, religion, education, income - Inundating systems with false accusations of bad parenting, cheating, using drugs, being "crazy"- Exploiting "children need a father" to gain sympathy - Isolating her from family, friends, practitioners, other supporters
ENDANGERING CHILDREN
Neglecting them when they're with him - Putting them in age-inappropriate emotional, physical situations - Using violence in front of children
WITHHOLDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT
- Withholding child support, insurance, medical, basic-expense payments - Using court action to take her money, resources - Interfering with her ability to work - Blocking access to money after separation
UNRELENTING FOCUS ON HER
Prior physical and sexual violences, coercive and controlling behavior against mother and child(ren)
Systems and Institutions
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202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
218-722-2781
www.theduluthmodel.org