SUBMISSION, SILENCE AND SHAME: MENNONITE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WIFE ABUSE

by

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ABSTRACT

Employing feminist research methods, this qualitative study has examined the problem of wife abuse, focusing specifically on the experiences of Mennonite women. Mennonites were selected because of their conservative theological teachings and their historical tradition as a "peace church." Research has revealed that women in abusive relationships face many obstacles when attempting to end the abuse and/or their relationships. This thesis examines whether Mennonite women experience additional impediments as a result of their socialization within a conservative Christian church.

Through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with nine formerly abused Mennonite wives, the women's abuse experiences were documented, as well as their coping strategies and reasons for remaining with their abusers. Additionally, the women were asked about their help seeking experiences and whether various church teachings hindered or helped them in understanding or coping with the abuse, and if and how their personal beliefs changed as a result of their abuse experiences.

This study found that Mennonite women experienced varying forms of abuse. All nine of the research participants were emotionally/psychologically abused, while eight of the nine women were physically abused. Six of the women were also sexually abused by their husbands. Although all but one of the women were physically abused, the majority of the participants felt that the emotional abuse was the most detrimental to their

emotional and physical well-being, a finding consistent with other literature on wife abuse.

The women remained committed to their marriages for as long as they did largely because they adhered to a traditional religious ideology, one that encouraged hierarchical marital relationships and stressed marital permanence. In addition, church teachings concerning the practices of submission, obedience, love and forgiveness reinforced their decisions to remain with their husbands and encouraged the women to accept responsibility for the "success" of their marriages. Consequently, the women experienced much guilt and self-blame, which led them to deny the abuse to themselves, to friends and family members, and to therapists and pastors. The women's internalization of the Mennonite peace theology affirmed their conviction to be peacemakers in their families. By attempting to maintain peaceful relations in the home, the women "turned the other cheek," and forgave their husbands' abusiveness. The women's desire to love and forgive their husbands increased their vulnerability to abuse because it encouraged passive acceptance of their husbands' actions.

This study found that the advice the participants received from church pastors typically blamed the women for their problems and encouraged them to change their own attitudes and behaviours. As a result, the women were disappointed with the help they received from their churches. Conversely, the women experienced a renewed faith in God as they endured their abusive marriages and the termination of those relationships. Their personal faith in God was a resource to them, while their churches were impediments. As a result, eight of the nine women left the churches they had been attending while they were married and sought larger, more liberal churches. In addition, the women began to

examine the Bible more closely and questioned the Mennonite church's emphasis on various theological teachings.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Purpose of this Study

This study has explored the experiences of abused Mennonite women in order to determine how the women made sense of their abuse in the context of their religious socialization and their personal beliefs and practices. More specifically, how did Mennonite theology affect the women's abuse experiences, and did their experiences influence their belief systems and their views regarding the Mennonite church. A central concern of this research project was to provide the research participants with an opportunity to speak at length about their experiences of coping with their husbands' abuse, their attempts at seeking help, and their journeys toward healing. The desire for in-depth interviews was motivated by the lack of academic research on abused Mennonite women.

I began this research with several questions: Were Mennonite women being abused by their husbands? What type(s) of abuse did they experience? How did Mennonite women cope with their abuse? Where did they turn to for help? Can Mennonite churches, which have a strong patriarchal tradition, help abused women? How were abuse victims treated by their pastors and their congregations? Do Mennonite theological teachings help or hinder women's abilities to cope with their abusive husbands? How have the women's abuse experiences altered their faith and/or confidence in various theological teachings?

Why Study Mennonites?

Women who are in relationships with abusive men face many obstacles when attempting to end the abuse and/or their relationships. Research reveals that economic, social and legal impediments often make the journey from being an abuse victim to being a survivor, a long and slow one. Christian women are faced with additional norms and values which stem from their religious beliefs and church teachings. Studying wife abuse in the context of religion is important because "violence within a Christian family can precipitate a personal crisis, an economic crisis, and almost always a crisis of faith" (Morris, 1988:17). Moreover, wife abuse is a reality which affects Christian women physically, psychologically, economically and spiritually (Fortune, 1980).

It has been suggested that religion should be viewed as a double-edged sword in relation to wife abuse, because it can be used to rationalize violence, as well as condemn it (Shupe, Stacey, Hazlewood, 1987). This thesis hopes to determine if Mennonite church teachings and women's belief systems present further obstacles and difficulties for abused women or if they are a resource as the women strive to understand, change, or leave their abusive situations.

Mennonites were selected because they are a conservative Protestant denomination whose theology is more fundamentalist than mainline Protestant denominations (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). As such, Mennonite beliefs systems and practices are considered to be fairly rigid and traditional, which makes them easier to examine. In addition, Mennonites are of interest because of their long-standing peace theology, a teaching which distinguishes them from other Protestant denominations. In order to more fully

understand the unique characteristics of Mennonites, a brief historical overview is presented, followed by a discussion of current Mennonite values and beliefs.

An Historical Overview of Mennonites

Mennonites are a Protestant religious and ethnic group whose origins date back to the Reformation, a 16th century European movement to reform the Christian church (Dyck, 1967). Reformers such as Martin Luther and Conrad Grebel were discontented and disillusioned with "the moral and spiritual corruption in the Medieval Church" (Toews, 1975:4) and called for changes in its faith and practice. First known as anabaptists (rebaptizers), Mennonites received their name from their leader Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Dutch Catholic priest who renounced his priesthood in 1536. Menno had serious doubts about various Catholic doctrines and became impressed with the teachings of Luther and Grebel. Menno became the leader of the first "free" Protestant church, a church based on voluntary membership and a believer's baptism, at a mature age, rather than membership through infant baptism (Wiebe, 1984). Menno taught that the "true church" consisted of believers who were committed to holy living and discipleship (Toews, 1975).

Anabaptists called for the "rejection of state authority over the religious conscience" (Epp, 1978:22), and nonconformity of believers to the secular world. They emphasized a lifestyle devoted to loving one's enemies, feeding the hungry, being honest, and working for reconciliation between conflicting groups (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). Additionally, Anabaptists refused to perform military service because of their conviction

that the essence of Christian life was expressed in discipleship, a major component of which was an "ethic of love and nonresistance as applied to all human relationships" (Toews, 1975:12). These philosophies and actions placed the early Anabaptists, including the Mennonites, under extreme persecution from the state.

The persecution of Mennonites has been a central aspect of their history, resulting in a past dominated by migration. Mennonite migration was based upon both economic and religious beliefs. As a group, they were known for their hard work and were welcomed in many countries because of their agricultural skills. "For over three hundred years farming was considered to be *the* Mennonite way of life and the rural community the indispensable form of organizing their common life" (Dyck, 1967:292). However, their stay in various countries was not long; when their host countries desired their military involvement, they fled to avoid conscription. The Mennonites from Switzerland and South German states migrated to the United States as early as the 17th century. Mennonites of Dutch- North German origin migrated eastward to East and West Prussia and then to the Lower Volga and the Ukraine in Russia. In Russia, Mennonites settled in colonies and were given the right to control their own religious, educational and civic affairs (Dyck, 1967). Here they prospered economically; however, the Russian Revolution, and later World Wars I and II forced many Mennonites to flee to Canada and the USA, as well as South America. In the Americas, many of them continued agricultural pursuits in small communities, largely made up of other Mennonites.

Mennonites Today: Beliefs and Values

Today, Mennonite rural heritage has given way to urbanization, following the general trend within society after World War II. Since Mennonites came to North America from different regions of Europe and Russia, and over a time span of two centuries, they brought with them a variety of cultural forms and religious concerns (Dyck, 1967). As such, Mennonites have been, and continue to be, a heterogenous group in lifestyle and religious observance (Peters, 1987). Within North America there are five different Mennonite denominations: the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren Church, Brethren in Christ Church and the Evangelical Mennonite Church (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). The most recent total **world** membership of baptized Mennonite church members exceeds 973,000. In Canada there are 117,932 baptized church members, while 298,781 reside in the United States (Mennonite Reporter, 1994). In Canada, the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and the Mennonite Brethren Church (MB) are the two largest denominations. The GC denomination is regarded as the most liberal out of the five denominations.

Mennonite ethnicity and religiosity are closely intertwined. In fact, at times in their history there has been "an almost complete overlapping of the two spheres" (Epp, 1978:22). Religious values have informed and reinforced Mennonite cultural norms. There has been a tradition of religious and social nonconformity, perpetuated by Mennonites often living in segregated rural communities. The Mennonite definition of Christianity is narrower than that of many other Christian denominations. Mennonites believe that individuals must have personal, life-changing encounters with Christ in order

to become Christians and join the church (Bibby, 1987). In addition, the Bible is considered to be the Word of God, infallible and inerrant. It is generally considered to be the supreme authority on all matters of faith and practice (Wiebe, 1984).

The biblical norms that Mennonites emphasize include:

> the sacredness of the marriage vows, the permanence of marriage, the sinfulness of fornication and adultery, family headship of the husband-father, the need of children to be taught to be dutiful and obedient, [and] the priority of family needs over individual preferences... (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991:105).

The family is considered to be an important institution, a place where primary socialization occurs. Traditionally, among Mennonites, there has been a marked division of labour between the sexes (Redekop, 1986). Women's roles have included childbearing and rearing, household management, and subordination to the rule of husbands. Men's roles involve being the provider, caretaker and decision-maker. As the quotation above suggests, Mennonites have encouraged hierarchical and patriarchal relationships between husbands and wives, and between parents and children. Women's subordination was, and in many Mennonite churches continues to be, justified by a conservative religious ideology that teaches hierarchy and inequality as natural and ordained by God.

Recently, however, there has been a slight shift away from hierarchical, patriarchal marriages to more egalitarian ones, at least with respect to people's attitudes regarding sex roles (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991; Redekop, 1986). Kauffman and Driedger (1991) report that of their North American Mennonite sample, 45% agreed and 17% strongly agreed that household tasks should be shared nearly equally between husbands and wives.

Twenty-one percent disagreed and only 2% strongly disagreed, while 15% of the respondents were uncertain. In response to the statement: "whenever the wife and husband cannot agree on a matter, the husband's decision should be followed," 31% of the respondents disagreed, and 12% strongly disagreed. Twenty-five percent were uncertain, while another 25% agreed and 7% strongly agreed with the statement. These responses suggest that there is some uncertainty among Mennonites regarding gender issues, although they also indicate that attitudes are not thoroughly patriarchal.

Mennonite Peace Theology

Mennonites are distinguished from other Protestant groups by their pacifist position, although this peace theology is not exclusive to Mennonites. Defined generally, pacifism is "an opposition to war or violence as a means of settling disputes or an attitude of non-violent resistance to evil" (Dombrowski, 1991:5). The Anabaptist movement, under Menno Simons' leadership, "established nonresistance as an essential tenet of the faith" (Brock, 1991:97). The sword, considered by Anabaptists to be an instrument of ultimate power, was rejected as "not belonging to those whose primary loyalty was the kingdom of God" (Epp, 1978:22). Rather, Christians were to "fight only with the sword of the spirit, that is, `the Word of God'; they must rely on Christ alone for their protection" (Brock, 1991:97). Consequently, Mennonites have typically refused to engage in active fighting during times of war.

"Mennonite peace theology has gone through significant developments in the past several decades" (Loewen, 1992:277). In 1950, a strong, formal statement opposing war

was developed by the Mennonite Central Committee (Herr, 1993). Recognizing that peace and love are the central teachings of Jesus Christ and thus essential to obeying God's call, voices within the Mennonite community have suggested that the peace theology should emphasize more than the macro-level peace witness. It should also focus on the family and community, on more personal matters. Consequently, areas such as mediation counselling, dealing with abuse victims, and the creation of ethics statements for pastors are slowly being addressed. However,

> [w]e are only beginning to relate all of these areas conceptually to a theology of peace. More work needs to be done to create a broader understanding of peacemaking (Lebold, 1992:317).

An integral part of the Mennonite way of life is a strong sense of social responsibility, revealed in service and relief work. In 1920, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was formed to help Mennonites in Russia suffering from the effects of revolution, famine, disease and dislocation. By the end of World War II, Mennonite churches were more than ever convinced that their doctrines of love and nonresistance meant continuing relief and service ministries around the world (Dyck, 1967). Today MCC assists not only other Mennonites, but desires to liberate those who are poor, oppressed and needy throughout the world. As of 1993, there were over 900 workers serving in 54 countries in community development, education, health, food production, administration, and peace and reconciliation work (Brubaker, 1994).

Out of a recognition that not only were there oppressed persons in third world countries, but that women in North America also experienced oppression, the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns was formed in 1973. This committee has addressed

various social issues of particular concern to women. One method of doing so has been through a bi-monthly women's publication (Women's Concerns Report). A chief concern for this committee has been family violence. Arising from this concern, a Task Force on Domestic Violence was founded in the 1980's which produced a resource packet for pastors and lay persons. In addition, since 1990, MCC has helped sponsor conferences and seminars in the hopes of creating greater awareness about family violence. Mennonite academics and professionals have also begun to address this issue.[1]

Although the Mennonite church has a legacy as an "historic peace church," this peace position has been most evident in refusal to participate in war-time fighting. If Mennonites understand pacifism to mean resolving conflicts peacefully, then the issue of family violence could, and should, be of greater concern to them. Although MCC is beginning to address the problem of violence within families, it is unclear if Mennonite pastors are addressing the issue of abuse and/or relating Mennonite peace theology to violence in the home. This thesis will provide some insights into this uncertainty.

Definitions

Before moving on to review the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on abuse and religion, it is important to clarify some of the terms I will be using in this paper. Defining one's terms is essential because it specifies how a phenomenon is measured, and identifies relevant theory and research. In this study, I employ the term "wife abuse" to

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[1] In October 1991, theologians and therapists met in Indiana to discuss the subject of violence against women and its relationship to Mennonite peace theology.

describe the problem under investigation. This social problem has been given a variety of names: wife battering, beating, wife assault, family violence, domestic violence, domestic dispute and inter-spousal violence. Although all of these names could be used, I prefer to use the term "wife abuse" because it most accurately reflects what is taking place. Other terms obscure who is being abused by whom; 95% of the victims of "domestic violence" are women (BC Task Force on Family Violence, 1992). The term "wife" is used because all participants in this study were legally married to their abusers. Within the wife abuse literature, however, "wife" typically refers to any woman who is legally married to, or who is sexually and/or emotionally linked to, a male cohabiter (MacLeod, 1980).

Abusive behaviours toward wives exist on a continuum: mild forms of abuse occur more often than severe forms, but the abuse usually becomes progressively more severe as time elapses (Stets, 1988; Walker, 1979). While abusive behaviour is appropriately defined as violence, this term emphasizes the physical aspect of this problem. Abuse should be more broadly defined as physical, psychological and sexual suffering. It is not the result of a momentary loss of control (Kauffman-Kennel, 1987); rather, it is the systematic abuse of power and control that husbands have and use against their wives in order to maintain their control in relationships, and to control their partners' actions (BC Task Force on Family Violence, 1992).

I recognize that abusive behaviours range in magnitude and scope, but for the purposes of this study, wife abuse has been divided into three categories: psychological/emotional, physical and sexual.

Psychological/emotional abuse encompasses various tactics to undermine a

woman's self-confidence. These include: ignoring or belittling her feelings, insulting her friends/family or driving them away, and withholding approval, appreciation or affection as a punishment. Constant criticism, blaming her for his abusiveness, accusing her of having an affair with another man, hurting or killing a family pet, and damaging property are also forms of emotional abuse (Morris, 1988). Additionally, making her do degrading things, terrorizing her by driving recklessly or threatening to harm her and/or the child(ren) are forms of psychological abuse (Sinclair, 1985). Controlling a woman's activities and money are also included within this category.

Physical abuse includes any act carried out by a husband that is intended to, or perceived by the woman as intended to, hurt her (Brinkerhoff, Grandin & Lupri, 1992). It can include pushing, shoving, biting, choking, kicking, slapping, hitting, punching, throwing objects, threatening to use, or actually using a gun or knife, stabbing or burning (Morris, 1988).

Sexual abuse may begin with telling demeaning jokes about women, name calling and unwanted touching. It includes forced sexual activity, as well as forced distasteful and painful sexual acts. Women's compliance to forced sexual activity (rape) is typically obtained through the threat of force, coercion or actual physical violence (Sinclair, 1985).

Organization of Thesis

This thesis has been divided into six chapters. This chapter has provided an introduction to the research topic as well as a brief overview of Mennonite history and current theological teachings. Chapter two reviews the theoretical and empirical literature

on wife abuse, with an emphasis on studies which examine the relationship between abuse and religion. The third chapter discusses the research process, outlining the methods used to undertake this study. Chapter four examines the women's abuse experiences, how they coped, why they remained with their husbands, and how their relationships ended. The fifth chapter examines the women's attempts at help seeking, with specific focus on the women's church experiences. The concluding chapter summarizes the research findings and discusses the relationship between Mennonite women's abuse experiences and Mennonite church teachings, and how these teachings influenced the women's beliefs and actions. Following a bibliography, four appendices are included.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

In this chapter I discuss patriarchy and Christian theology in their historical, social and religious contexts, and examine their relationship to wife abuse. I have restricted the review of the empirical literature to predominantly those studies which address the relationship between wife abuse, patriarchal ideology and religion. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion of some methodological concerns of past research and suggest how this study contributes to the body of wife abuse literature.

Family violence, and more specifically wife abuse, has been discussed, theorized and researched from a variety of perspectives over the past twenty years. An extensive review of the literature concerning why men abuse their wives will not be provided here as it has been well documented by various researchers and theorists.[1] For the purposes of this thesis, explanations of wife abuse have been placed into three broad theoretical perspectives: psychological, sociological, and feminist.

Early research and theorizing about male violence developed under the assumption that this was a rare occurrence; only a small number of deviant individuals with severe emotional problems, including mental illness, were violent toward their wives (Frankel-Howard, 1989; Pagelow, 1984). Early theorists concentrated on the characteristics of the violent men, suggesting that they possessed common attributes. These included insecurity, low self-esteem, delusional jealousy, depression and poor communication skills

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[1] For a good review of the literature of family violence, see Smith, 1989; Frankel-Howard, 1989; Dobash & Dobash, 1979.

(Martin, 1981; Walker, 1979; Pizzey, 1974). In addition, psychologists examined the characteristics of abused women and stated that they were neurotic, mentally ill or masochistic, because they remained with their abusers (Smith, 1989).

Psychological explanations were criticized by sociologists who argued that they placed too much emphasis upon the individual. Additionally,

> [t]he sheer prevalence of wife abuse as well as the patterned variation in rates among different social groups raises questions about efforts to identify psychological factors as primary causes of battering (Bograd, 1988:18).

Popular sociological explanations of male violence against women have focused upon social structural factors, including social organization and cultural values and norms.

Socio-economic stress has been widely suggested as an explanation for domestic violence. According to this theory, various circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing, overcrowding, low occupational status and lack of education, contribute to a build-up of stress and this stress may ultimately reveal itself in outbursts of violence (Gelles, 1983; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). Socio-cultural explanations argue that violence is part of society; consequently, there is cultural approval of violence, perpetuated by sports, movies, television, the media, and even toys (Frankel-Howard, 1989; Pagelow, 1984). In addition, the inter-generational transmission theory, also known as the learning theory of abuse, has been proposed as a contributing factor to why some men abuse their wives and why some women are more likely to be victims of abuse (Frankel-Howard, 1989).

Quantitative methods have typically been employed by sociologists researching

domestic violence, with a majority of studies measuring physical violence. These methods have provided information concerning how many women are abused, as well as socio-demographic information on perpetrators and victims. From national studies, we know that wife abuse occurs within all age groups, races, religions, incomes, educational and geographic locales (Pagelow, 1984). Some relationships or socio-demographic factors, however, appear to be correlated with a greater likelihood of abuse. These include couples who are young, and men who have low levels of education, low income, and low occupational prestige/status (Smith, 1990a; Straus et al., 1980).

In Canada, a statistic still commonly cited is that 1 in 10 women will be physically abused by their husbands/partners (MacLeod, 1980). However, a 1993 Statistics Canada nationwide telephone survey of 12,300 women, revealed that 29% of married/common-law women reported violence from a partner (Brady, 1993). Some empirical research has found that violence is not merely perpetrated by husbands, but that wives are also abusive toward their husbands/partners (most notably Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). This suggestion is a result of statistical findings generated by the widely-used Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) developed by Straus. Most research, however, suggests that it is husbands who are violent toward their wives/partners.[2]

Within the sociological tradition, feminists have critiqued mainstream abuse explanations for failing to explain why males were violent toward a specific target, their

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[2] Some men are abused by their partners, but this abuse is typically not accompanied with the same threat of physical violence. In addition, abuse of men is not reinforced by social, religious and economic factors that make up part of women's experiences (Morris, 1988). Moreover, there is much literature that suggests that although women may be physically hitting their spouses, this is often done in self-defense (Hoff, 1990).

wives/partners (Schechter, 1982). Further, feminists have challenged traditional sociological theory for failing to address the social and historical contexts of abuse. Moreover, feminists have worked to change the definition of this problem from family or domestic violence, to wife abuse, arguing that gender neutral terms mask who is doing what to whom (Bograd, 1988).

Feminist researchers and theorists have criticized the CTS measure. These scales measure abuse by counting individual acts of violence by both husbands and wives without determining the severity of the injury, or whether the act of violence was in self-defense (Yllo, 1988). Moreover, this measure overlooks the wider social and ideological forces that influence men to harm their wives in order to maintain their dominance and control (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991).

Patriarchy's Relationship to Abuse

Feminist theory suggests that gender inequality provides the foundation for violence against women, and thus a discussion of patriarchy is necessary (Hoff, 1990; Bograd, 1988; Pagelow, 1984; Schechter, 1982; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Patriarchy should be understood as both a structure and an ideology (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). However, at its simplest, patriarchy refers to the rule of the father or male. Patriarchy is a system of social relations which includes a complex system of beliefs and practices (Horsfall, 1991; Walby, 1990). The patriarchal social structure has created a dominant-subordinate relationship between men and women both within the public and the private realms of society. This patriarchal structure does not operate alone; it is maintained by an

ideology which has been institutionalized by the economic, legal, political, social and religious establishments which are themselves hierarchically organized. Structure and ideology work together to ensure that women and men accept, or at least submit to, the existing hierarchical order (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

The patriarchal tradition began long before the Greeks and Romans and was well established at the time of the writings of the Hebrew Bible (Lerner, 1986). The family has been a long-standing, powerful patriarchal institution. The term "family" is derived from the Roman word "familia," signifying the totality of slaves belonging to an individual male citizen. Slave owners had absolute power over those who belonged to them, including women and children (Martin, 1981).

Within the Roman Empire, the first marriage laws were proclaimed by Romulus in 753 BC, which gave husbands, upon marriage, the absolute ownership and control over all property and people including their wives, who were viewed as necessary and inseparable possessions (Okun, 1986; Freedman, 1985). Integral to the marriage laws was the explicit legal right to correct and chastise a wife (known as the Law of Chastisement), for transgressions such as drinking wine, adultery or any action that might indicate that a husband did not exercise complete control over his wife's behaviour (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

English common law clearly established husbands' rights over their wives' person, property and daily affairs, for upon marriage the two became one. Thus, a man could not be guilty of raping or beating his wife because it was not possible to commit a crime against oneself (Scutt, 1983). This legal right was slightly modified by the 19th century

"rule of thumb," a progressive law which stated that husbands could only beat their wives with a rod no thicker than a thumb (Stets, 1988; Martin, 1981). In the 20th century, women have gained recognition as persons under the law, and men are no longer encouraged to beat their wives. However, the legacy of the patriarchal tradition is still very evident within various institutions in society.

Presently, our culture is still hierarchically organized; generally, men have more power than women. Research indicates that the greater the power imbalance between couples, the greater the potential for abuse (Russell, 1982). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz found that wife beating was "much more common in homes where power is concentrated in the hands of the husband. The least amount of battering occurs in democratic homes" (1980:193).

Control and exploitation by the more powerful of the less powerful has been reinforced by traditional sex role socialization, in which we are taught what traits, behaviours and beliefs are appropriate for males and females (BC Task Force on Family Violence, 1992; Stets, 1988; Walker, 1979). Sex role socialization has taught women to be, among other things: beautiful, chaste, deferential, passive, cooperative, and servile. On the other hand, the ideal man should be the protector and breadwinner: bold, strong, powerful, competitive, virile and in command (The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Research reveals that a common characteristic of both partners in violent relationships is adherence to traditional notions about the appropriate roles for men and women (Sinclair, 1985).

An aspect of this socialization is the belief that men have a right to exercise

authority over their partners (Hopkins & McGregor, 1991). Empirical research lends support for this argument. Finn's (1986) study of 300 college undergraduates revealed that those who held more traditional attitudes, whether male or female, were more likely to believe that men had the right to maintain their dominant position within a marital relationship by physical force. Similarly, women who held traditional sex role attitudes were more likely to justify a man beating his wife than those who exhibited egalitarian sex role attitudes (Gentemann, 1984).

Other research has examined the relationship between sex role attitudes and norms against "forced marital intercourse" or wife rape (Jeffords, 1984). Jeffords found that persons with traditional sex role attitudes were much less likely to believe forced marital intercourse was undesirable than were persons with "modern" sex role attitudes. A belief in traditional sex roles appears to encourage attitudes that makes it permissable for husbands to sexually and physically abuse their wives and for women to accept this treatment. Research has revealed that the more intensely women believe this traditional ideology, the more likely they are to remain in abusive relationships, and the less likely they are to act in ways to significantly alter their situations in a positive way (Pagelow, 1981).

Smith's (1990b) Canadian study found that at an interpersonal level, wife abuse resulted from adherence by batterers to an ideological belief in familial patriarchy, a belief that legitimized male power and authority over women in marriage. According to this research, husbands who, in the eyes of their wives/partners, espoused a set of beliefs and attitudes supportive of patriarchy in a domestic context, were more likely to have

assaulted their partners at some point in their relationships, than husbands who did not espouse such beliefs and attitudes. Thus, it appears that adherence to a rigid sex role ideology is related to abuse, for it encourages both men and women to accept hierarchical relationships as normative.

In addition to patriarchy and its implications for women's oppression, capitalism has contributed to, and reinforced, male privilege, which is conducive to male violence against women. Not only is the family organized around a hierarchy in which males occupy the dominant positions, but within capitalism, women have typically had inferior status because they are primarily wageless or low-wage earners (Schechter, 1982). This places women in powerless or near powerless positions economically. Studies have shown that wives who are economically dependent on their husbands are less likely to leave an abusive relationship (Martin, 1981; MacLeod, 1980). Likewise, Straus et al. (1980) found that wives were more likely to be abused when they were not in the paid labour market, and when they were excluded from family decision making.

One of the results of capitalism was the public-private/domestic split (Horsfall, 1991). The separation of the public and private resulted from capitalist industrialization as household production gave way to factory work, and male and female roles became more specialized (Bograd, 1988). Under capitalism, the public arena (workforce) became the domain of the men and the private realm (household and childcare responsibilities) became the women's sphere. Women's relative isolation from one another may provide men with the opportunity to abuse their wives.

The privacy of the family has been strongly defended by legal, social and religious

institutions. "The private nature of intimate violence shelters offenders and victims from an audience, public eyes, and social control" (Gelles & Straus, 1988:30). Furthermore, social values discourage people from interfering in the intimate relationship between husbands and wives (Martin, 1981). Consequently, concerned others may not become involved even if they suspect that a woman is being abused by her husband. Family privacy, and women's relative isolation, further exacerbate the problem because abused women may feel as though they are the only ones experiencing abuse, making it more difficult for them to speak up or to leave. Additionally, relative isolation decreases the likelihood of women working together to gather resources to escape the violence (Horsfall, 1991).

The Patriarchal Tradition in Christian Theology and Teaching

In addition to the economic, legal and social institutions, religion has been a powerful reinforcer of patriarchal relations and ideology (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Women's subordination to males has a long history in Christian theology and teaching. Theological arguments used to justify women's inferior position have been based on the belief that women are physically, intellectually and morally inferior to men. Ruether (1989) argues that theology has been influenced by Aristotelian biology. Aristotle taught that women were a secondary biological species; females were "misbegotten males" who had a defective capacity for humanity. To Aristotle, women were natural servants because of their obedient nature. He also believed that the body was evil and that women represented the carnal. St. Augustine argued that women lacked the "image of God" and

could only gain this image when they were united with a man. He considered women unable to represent Christ in Christian society because of Christ's perfect humanity. Thomas Aquinas used the original order of creation to justify women's subjugation, which he argued existed before Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden (Ruether, 1989). Moreover, he taught that male fetuses received their souls at an earlier age than did female fetuses (Task Force Report of Anglican Church, 1987).

During the middle ages, churches sanctioned violence against women as a form of discipline and chastisement. A fifteenth century publication called "Rules of Marriage" suggested the following:

> Scold your wife sharply, bully and terrify her. If this does not work, take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and repair the body.... Then readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul so that the beating will redound to your merit and her good (Fortune, 1982:19).

Throughout the ages, most women have accepted their subordinate position in society, within churches and within their families. Social pressure, the moral order and fear of eternal damnation ensure that women conform to these social and religious norms.

Mennonite church teachings have sanctioned hierarchical relationships between men and women through reference to the Bible, typically refering back to the creation story in Genesis. This story teaches that man was created first, the woman in response to his need. As a result, women and their offspring are the property of men and therefore subject to male power and control (Bohn, 1989). The order of creation is used as the first example of hierarchy and provides the foundation for religious and matrimonial hierarchy.

This hierarchy, it is often argued, is God ordained. Moreover, the subjugation of wives to husbands is justified in Old Testament scriptures, Genesis 3:16, as women's punishment for Eve's wrongdoing in the Garden of Eden (Bohn, 1989).

The Pauline Epistles (in the New Testament), are also used to reinforce women's subordinate position within families and in many Christian churches. St. Paul bids wives to be subordinate to their husbands, for the head of every man is Christ but the head of every woman is man (Ephesians 5:23-24). New Testament scriptures also state that women are to remain silent in the church and are not to have authority over men there (I Corinthians 14:34-35). Appealing to scriptures is a particularly effective means of perpetuating hierarchy because conservative denominations traditionally accept the Bible as inerrant.

Research on Abuse and Religion

It would seem likely that the relationship between religion and wife abuse would have been thoroughly examined since western culture has been built, to a large degree, upon the influence of Christian traditions. However, according to some researchers, "the relation of religion to family violence has been virtually ignored" within empirical sociological research (Shupe, Stacey & Hazlewood, 1987).

Initial large-scale research on wife abuse occasionally included questions on religious affiliation, in order to measure religiosity. The American national study by Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) included this variable, determining that among respondents who declared a religious affiliation, minority religion husbands (non-

Protestant, non-Catholic and non-Jewish) had the highest rate of wife abuse while Jewish husbands had the lowest. The researchers suggested that religion's influence on rates of marital violence was minimal, but that the variation in violence reflected differences in the social and demographic characteristics of the religious groups, such as income and education (Straus et al., 1980).

Gelles (1987) reported that there were generally high levels of violence in families where one or both of the spouses was an agnostic, atheist or had no religion. Additionally, there was a greater likelihood of general violence occurring within families when a religious difference between the spouses existed. Likewise, Brinkerhoff, Grandin and Lupri's Canadian study (1992) found that males identifying with no denomination were the most violent. These studies suggested that religious affiliation affected abuse rates because religious men were less violent than non-religious men. In contrast, Smith's (1990a) Toronto studies concluded that there was no statistically significant relationship between religion (measured by religious affiliation) and abuse.

Brutz and Allen (1986) advanced the measurement of religiosity by examining religious commitment among Quakers, operationalized as religious participation and global commitment (a subjective indicator of the personal sense of commitment to beliefs of Quakers). Quakers are a religious group similar to Mennonites with regard to their pacifist doctrine. The researchers found that lower levels of marital violence tended to be associated with high levels of religious participation and global commitment to Quaker teachings (Brutz & Allen, 1986).

The researchers suggested that the negative relationship between commitment and

marital violence may be due to the Quaker commitment to nonviolence. Examining the relationship between peace activism (identified as a consequence of religious commitment for Quakers), and marital violence revealed a gender difference. Wives who had a high level of peace activism were less likely to be violent toward their husbands, while husbands who had a high level of peace activism were more likely to abuse their spouses. The researchers suggested that religious beliefs about appropriate behaviour may have been confounded with the more universal beliefs of society in general, such as nonaggression for wives and aggressiveness for husbands. A commitment to Quaker beliefs did result in reduced violence, although perhaps only because the principles to which Quakers were committed fostered this nonviolence (Brutz & Allen, 1986).

The Brutz and Allen study revealed that religious commitment, not affiliation, was a more appropriate indicator of religious influence and that important gender-related differences existed in the meaning attached to religious experience and violence. The researchers proposed that the relationship between these variables could not be properly assessed without knowledge of particular religious beliefs and the degree of commitment to them.

"Much of the rationale for suggesting a relationship between religion and wife abuse stems from the assumption that members of more fundamentalistic groups tend to be more patriarchal" (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992:17). In order to test this hypothesis, these researchers examined the relationship between spousal violence and religious commitment, operationalized as denominational affiliation and frequency of church attendance. They hypothesized that conservative Protestant men would have a stronger belief in patriarchy

and thus be more likely to assert their dominance over their wives in violent ways. They found, however, that conservative Protestant men were not more violent or abusive than other men; neither denomination nor church attendance appeared to be correlated with spousal violence.

Brinkerhoff et al. concluded that "the patriarchy thesis, as related to religion, is thus questionable" since there was little, if any, relationship between religiosity and spouse abuse (1992:28). In contrast, Bowker (1983) found that frequent church attendance by husbands tended to be correlated with a shortened total length of violence and a slight decrease in its severity. Church attendance, however, had no effect on the frequency of assaults, violence during pregnancy or marital rape. Bowker (1983) also determined that women who attended church more often, endured more years of violence than women who attended church less often, or not at all. Another study found that "not only does the religious victim appear to stay married longer, but she also goes to great lengths to save her relationship" (Horton, Wilkins & Wright, 1988:240).

It appears likely that Christian churches, with their religious teachings, may have more to do with creating an environment in which women have difficulty leaving an abuser than with encouraging men to abuse their wives. This suggests that Christian theological teachings and their influence on women, especially women in abusive relationships, should be explored more fully.

Christian Theology and Women's Socialization

Within Christian literature, concern has been raised, predominantly from feminist

writers and theologians, that certain religious teachings are potentially detrimental to women's physical and emotional well-being, and even more so for victims of abuse (Heggen, 1993, 1992; Hildebrand, 1992; Brown & Parker, 1989; Morris, 1988; Fortune, 1980). Although religious beliefs do not cause abuse, certain beliefs and teachings appear to create an environment in which abuse can occur. Church teachings and personal beliefs influence how people act and react to their situations. Consequently, these beliefs and practices may be a hindrance for abused women who are attempting to stop the abuse or leave their abusers. Essentially, "theological assumptions feed into the experience of abuse" (Heggen, 1992:73). These theological teachings and practices include: submission, obedience, suffering, selflessness, forgiveness and marital permanence.

Male dominance and female submission have been elevated as important Christian teachings. Many Christians, particularly conservative, fundamentalist ones, believe that the Bible promotes a sexual hierarchy and that wives should submit to their husbands under all conditions, even violence (Task Force Report of Anglican Church, 1987). More progressive thinkers argue that this submission theology has been corrupted into a theology of dominance (Block, 1991). Men have been taught that they have the right to use their power and authority to make demands on their wives, who should obey. Their position as head of the family is laid out in the Bible, and some men use this position of power to enforce obedience and submission. Moreover, men may use biblical teachings to justify their use of violence (Shupe et al., 1987).

Submission theology is dangerous because it makes women more susceptible to violence and heightens the likelihood that battered women will "remain in abusive

relationships long after they should" (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989:82). Alsdurf and Alsdurf (1989) found that two-thirds of their sample of 100 abused Christian women felt that it was their Christian duty to endure their husbands' violence. When women's primary responsibility in marriage is to submit, and this does not occur, it may be seen as grounds for a beating (Shupe et al., 1987).

Heggen (1993) found that Christian women's beliefs regarding submission were related to their self-esteem; women who believed in the traditional model of female subordination had lower self-esteem scores than women who believed in equality and partnership for men and women. "Self-esteem is critical for emotional well-being. People with low self-esteem cannot effectively guard against abusive [husbands]" (Heggen, 1993). If women have internalized that they are inferior to men, they are more likely to accept abuse and remain victims (Sinclair, 1985). In this manner, the submission theology has helped to acculturate women to accept abuse (Brown & Parker, 1989).

In Christian churches, and in society at large, women have been assigned the "suffering-servant role," a role which reinforces and perpetuates women's subordinate position (Brown & Parker, 1989). Christian teaching, such as the New Testament passage Matthew 5:11-12, emphasizes suffering and appeals to a reward in the afterlife for persecution endured presently. Although this passage is addressing suffering for Christ's sake, women may assume that the abuse they are enduring is their "cross to bear" and that they must suffer as Christ suffered (Morris, 1988). The abuse may be endured silently because it is considered part of the marriage contract, "for better or for worse." This distorted view of suffering increases women's vulnerability to abuse and, once abused, it

maintains their silence.

In addition to suffering, a Christian lifestyle includes self-sacrifice and obedience as qualities which define a faithful religious identity (Hildebrand, 1992; Brown & Parker, 1989). Woman are to be obedient to God and to their husbands, and they are to sacrifice their needs and desires to those of their husbands' and families'. Hildebrand argues that Christian women have often found it difficult to "develop a conception of their rights, needs, and responsibilities to self" (1992:77). This difficulty is partially a result of women's socialization to be the care-givers and nurturers; their concern has been directed to others. Most significantly, for this study, Mennonite values emphasize family needs over those of the individual (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). These theological teachings have provided a framework for women to accept abuse as justified. If women are encouraged to be passive and obedient, it is difficult to empower them to protect themselves by recognizing and leaving abusive husbands (Heggen, 1993).

Thistlewaite (1985) argues that Christian women have been taught to be meek, and that claiming rights for themselves is committing the sin of pride. Hildebrand (1992) proposes that although theological teachings have considered selfishness a sin, this theology is male-centered. "However, for women it is self-abnegation that needs to be understood as sin, in order that we find a balance between self-giving and self-nurturing" (Hildebrand, 1992:77).

Another potential theological difficulty for abused women is the Christian emphasis on forgiveness. Christ taught his disciples to forgive others and to "turn the other cheek." The ability and willingness to forgive has been preached as a fundamental Christian virtue,

with emphasis on the promptness of this act (Heggen, 1983). If Christian women accept that they are responsible for the successful maintenance of their families, abused wives may feel pressured into forgiving their husbands or returning to them after they have left. Alsdurf and Alsdurf found that the women in their study "repeatedly return[ed] to abusive relationships hoping to resolve the conflict and thus to not see themselves or their marriages as failures" (1989:76).

Often, abused women have been asked to forgive their husbands too quickly. To forgive and forget leaves the victim vulnerable (Regehr, 1986). Moreover, to request or expect forgiveness too quickly underestimates and minimizes the depth and significance of wife abuse (Heggen, 1992).

Teaching within Mennonite churches, as in other conservative Protestant groups, places a high value on the family and the sanctity of marriage (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). Christian churches can be faulted for placing such a high priority on marriage and the family that they overlook the needs of the individual (Walker, 1979). For Mennonites, as for other Christians, marriage is viewed as a spiritual covenant between two people and God, not merely a legal agreement (Block, 1991). In a 1989 survey of Mennonites in North America, Kauffman and Driedger found that attitudes toward the permanence of marriage were very high. Eighty-two percent of the Mennonite Brethrens (MBs), and 64% of the General Conference Mennonites (GCs), viewed marriage as a lifelong commitment, not to be broken except by death, while 18% of MBs and 35% of GCs accepted divorce only if all attempts at reconciliation had failed. Of the surveyed respondents, only 4.2% had experienced divorce or separation, an increase of 1% from

1972. Divorce figures for couples where only one partner was a Mennonite were somewhat higher, reaching 9% (Kauffman & Driedger, 1991). In contrast, the national average divorce rate in Canada was 43.1% in 1987 (Statistics Canada, 1992).

Pacifism is a central teaching and practice in Mennonite history and identity. Hildebrand (1992) argues that this peace theology has encouraged passivity and acceptance of abuse, especially for female members. The Mennonite church focuses upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized the ethic of love and nonresistance (Loewen, 1991). Christians are called to seek peace in all relationships. This peace position may add to Mennonite women's vulnerability because not only have they been taught to deal with conflict peacefully, but have been encouraged to turn the other cheek and to love those who do them harm.

Abuse in Christian Homes

Few statistics exist which describe the frequency of wife abuse specifically among Christians[3] (Petersen, 1985). The figures that do exist have been obtained through research undertaken within (and often by), various churches to ascertain the amount of abuse and violence within their congregations. In 1982, within the United Methodist Church in the USA, one in four of the study's respondents had been abused by their spouses, and another one in five respondents had family members or close friends who had been abused (Bohn, 1989). A survey conducted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

[3] The term Christian used here refers to persons who are regular church attenders, not merely those who state that they have a religious affiliation. As of 1986, one in three Canadians went to church, while only 25% of Canadians attend weekly (Bibby, 1987).

found that more than one of every four adults in the North American CRC had experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse at some point in their lives. A study of clergy in the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada revealed that one in six clergy indicated that there was spousal abuse in their family of origin (Fieguth, 1992).

Information on the incidence of abuse in Mennonite homes is sparse. Block (1991) surveyed 187 Mennonite adults in Winnipeg, of whom over two-thirds were women. He found that the respondents experienced 65 incidents of physical abuse in a 12 month period and 189 incidents of emotional abuse during that same period. His research also revealed that 20% of the respondents reported sexual abuse within the past 12 months (Block, 1991). This study, however, did not provide results on the basis of gender, nor did it determine who the perpetrators were (e.g., father, stranger, friend, husband). Block (1991) suggested that the abuse figures he observed were similar to the national average, and thus violence was likely to be just as prevalent within Mennonite homes as in other homes.

This study did not provide specific information about the incidence of wife abuse. However, Voices for Non-Violence, a Mennonite organization in Winnipeg, reported that during its first three months of operation, the Mennonite women contacting the agency had all been married for at least 30 years and had experienced abuse throughout their married lives (Block & Shantz, 1993). The fact that the women had been abused for 30 years and still remained married, suggests that there is a strong commitment to marital permanence or a strong norm against divorce among Mennonites.

Clergy Advice

If Christian churches have a history of male dominance, as well as teaching female subordination and passivity, what advice do the clergy provide when counselling abused women? More importantly, do Christian women speak with the clergy about their abuse? Bowker (1988) and Bohn (1989) both reported that approximately 40% of the battered women in their studies turned to the clergy for help. Another study reported that 54% of religious victims of wife abuse sought out religious leaders for guidance, while 38% of non-religious abused women also saw the clergy about their abuse (Horton et al., 1988). However, research has also found that women who seek help from the clergy are generally dissatisfied (Bowker, 1988; Horton et al., 1988).

Bowker (1988) stated that as a group, the clergy rated lower on effectiveness than most other formal help sources. This finding was supported by Horton, Wilkins and Wright (1988) who reported that of religious victims who, among others, consulted religious leaders, one-third regarded these leaders as the least helpful care providers. The clergy were the most conservative advice givers of all formal help agencies, often counselling couples to remain together regardless of the consequences for the wives' welfare (Bowker, 1988). According to Walker (1979), conservative Christian fundamentalists and some Catholic orders are likely to provide the least help for abused women.

Strom's (1986) research suggested that Christian women were generally dissatisfied with ministers because they typically minimized the impact of the violence they experienced. Moreover, out of ignorance, arrogance or embarrassment, the clergy has

often given the impression to women that violence is part of family life (Bohn, 1989).

Research on Mennonite pastoral advice-giving suggests that these church leaders are fairly conservative in their views. Block's (1991) research on the attitudes, theological orientation and the advice given by 41 Winnipeg Mennonite pastors reveals that 46% of the pastors agreed that they would tell abused women to be submissive and pray, trusting that God would change their spouses. Seventy-seven percent of the pastors agreed that they would tell women to be more assertive, while 15% of the pastors agreed that they would tell women to leave their spouse immediately. Seven percent agreed that women should separate immediately, and only 2% agreed that they would advise abused women to divorce immediately. A large majority (83%) agreed that they would advise women to remain in the home, but seek professional counselling, while 81% stated that they would advise women to remain in the home but obtain pastoral counselling (Block, 1991). Mennonite pastors appear to be very concerned with maintaining the institution of marriage. Thirty-nine percent agreed that "while violence by a spouse is not God's perfect will, it should not be overemphasized and used as a justification for breaking the marriage commitment" (Block, 1991:76).

In another study, pastors from conservative churches were asked to describe the personal qualities and behaviours of a spiritually healthy woman. This woman was described as submissive in the home, gentle and soft spoken, allows her spouse to make decisions, is dependent and passive, finds her identity through her spouse, and withholds criticism. These qualities were not used by pastors to describe a spiritually healthy male or an adult of unspecified gender (Heggen & Long, 1988 reported in Heggen, 1993). This

suggests that if abused women sought counsel from such pastors, their conservative advice would be a hindrance to the women. It would exacerbate their abusive situation because they would be encouraged to strive toward these "spiritually healthy characteristics." These characteristics do not encourage women to recognize or assert that they are being abused. Rather, they allow abusive husbands to continue their controlling behaviours.

Religion's Dual Role

Although religious leaders are sought out by abused Christian women, research indicates that the advice they provide is not necessarily in the women's best interests. Some women have reported losing their faith after unsuccessful attempts at obtaining help from religious leaders (Walker, 1979). Similarly, Horton et al. (1988) reported that many of the abused religious women in their study expressed that they felt trapped by their religion, and that they felt that they could not leave their husbands because they were taught that divorce was wrong. Moreover, several women complained that there was a misuse of scriptures and/or of male authority, and thus felt that religion was a detriment to their spiritual and physical well-being. Furthermore, religious beliefs, reinforced by church teachings, may strengthen women's feelings of guilt, self-blame and abhorrence of divorce, thereby reinforcing women's decisions to remain with their abusers (MacLeod, 1980).

In contrast, although the church and the clergy may not be a helpful resource to the women, religious beliefs and a faith in God are of great importance to many women. While women's religious beliefs may not protect them from their assaultive husbands,

many women have indicated that their beliefs were helpful for enduring suffering and for offering comfort (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989; Walker, 1979). Similarly, other abused Christian women have reported that their religious beliefs gave them courage, strength and hope. In addition to helping them cope, their beliefs provided them with inner peace, the power of prayer, and faith that God loved them (Horton et al., 1988).

Concerns Related to the Above Studies

Many of the empirical studies cited above have been quantitative in nature, typically using the Conflicts Tactics Scales to measure the amount of violence (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992; Smith, 1990a/b; Brutz & Allen, 1986; Straus et al., 1980). As noted earlier in this chapter, despite much criticism, these scales are still widely used. Typically, researchers who employ the scales acknowledge their shortcomings, yet fail to account for the potential bias in their findings. In addition, because the CTS focus on acts of violence, the results obtained do not report sexual abuse or the insidious amount of psychological/emotional manipulation. Thus, many forms of abusive behaviours are left undocumented.

Other research cited above was qualitative in nature. These studies used face-to-face interviews rather than telephone or mail-in surveys, in the hopes of obtaining in-depth information about abuse and how these women explained their experiences (Hoff, 1990; Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989; Horton et al., 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). I find that this research provides a better account of the multi-dimensional nature of abuse and provides information about how wife abuse is related to, or affected by, other

variables. These studies may not have large sample sizes, yet their findings are more detailed than quantitative research.

Within the sociological literature, religiosity has typically been measured by religious affiliation and/or religious attendance. Although these measures provide some insight into a person's religiosity, one cannot extrapolate from these measures how committed a person is to their church's various teachings and how these teachings influence a person's actions and reactions regarding abusive behaviour. By exploring the nature of religious beliefs, personal commitment to religious teachings and practices, and adherence of persons to a patriarchal ideology, the association between religion and abuse may be better understood.

Contributions of this Research

This research project contributes to our understanding of wife abuse and religion because it examines the experiences of abused Mennonite women, a group that has received limited empirical study. By employing in-depth interviews, this research allows the women to name and define their own experiences, rather than classifying their experiences according to predetermined categories.

Research on abuse and religion has scarcely examined the relationship between theological teachings and their effect on abused women. The literature addressing this relationship has predominantly been at the theoretical level. Although religious teachings and beliefs on their own do not appear to cause wife abuse, they appear to contribute by creating an environment in which women are susceptible to abuse, although they may not

recognize that they are being abused. The literature indicates that the relationship of religion to abuse is likely characterized by theological teachings which justify hierarchical marriages, encourage women to be obedient and passive, and promote family unity at all cost. These teachings and practices hinder women's ability to change their situations.

This thesis contributes to the literature by beginning to explore this relationship, determining which teachings, beliefs and practices are helpful to abused women, and which are more detrimental to them. Through in-depth interviews, I was able to obtain more detailed information than has been previously gathered by quantitative studies. This study also examines how Mennonite women's experiences of abuse affect their personal faith in God and their confidence in the Mennonite church and its teachings. These questions are explored in an attempt to more fully understand the social and spiritual problems and concerns faced by abused Christian women, and more specifically, abused Mennonite women.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

> The interrelationship between the researcher, topic, theory and method are particularly evident when research is undertaken on a value-laden topic like violence against women (Hoff, 1990:243).

In this chapter, I outline the relationship between myself as the researcher, the topic I have selected for this study, and the method used to gather the data. I also discuss how I gained access to the research participants and provide information concerning the data analysis process.

Feminist critiques of traditional sociology, along with feminist theorizing and research, have made important contributions to sociological theory and research methods.[1] The philosophies of positivism, rationalism and empiricism are the cornerstones of the social science tradition, which has been modelled after the natural sciences. Those who adhere to these traditions strive for rationality, impersonality, control over the events and phenomena studied, and prediction (Nielson, 1990). Research procedures developed out of this tradition are designed to produce objective, value-free findings which minimize the possibility of bias and subjectivity (Zalk & Gordon-Kelter, 1992). This objectivity demands that researchers exclude personal, subjectively-based knowledge because it lies outside of the domain of science. Consequently, efforts are made to prevent researchers' biases and values from entering into the research process. In contrast, feminist researchers argue that it is legitimate to allow one's interest in overcoming women's oppression to

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[1] Feminist critiques of traditional male-centered sociology will not be extensively outlined in this paper but there are numerous sources for that information (see Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983).

influence the research process (Mies, 1983). They maintain that values, interests and experience can be important guides for making decisions about what, and how, to research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

Selection of Research Topic

An important aspect of doing feminist research is to situate oneself in the research. In order to do so, I will provide some personal information to explain how and why I arrived at this research topic. My awareness and subsequent interest in abused women became very real and personal in the summer of 1991, while I was employed at a transition house. The horror, frustration, and hope I experienced and saw in the women at the shelter created a desire within me to further explore the problem of wife abuse. By the end of the summer, I knew that my thesis would examine wife abuse but I was uncertain as to what aspect I should research. Arriving at studying Mennonite women's experiences of wife abuse, with an emphasis on examining religion's role in the women's struggle, took a year to formalize.

That decision was strongly influenced by my personal background. I was raised in a Mennonite family within a largely Mennonite community in the Fraser Valley, and attended a Mennonite church, high school and Bible college there. Moving to Victoria to attend university placed some distance between me and my Mennonite community, allowing me to examine the Mennonite church from a somewhat more detached position. My university education, and especially the feminist courses I took, introduced me to new ways of seeing the world. Part of this new perspective was a concern about the negative

influence that various religious teachings can have. I began to see the Christian church as a patriarchal institution, one which was potentially oppressive to women because of its long history of subordinating them. By association, I recognized that Mennonite churches were not that different with respect to their teaching about women's roles in the church and family. Yet, I still clung to the hope that the Mennonite church, and one's personal faith, could be a source of liberation and strength for believers. I became aware of a discrepancy between Christianity as potentially oppressive, and personal faith as an important resource, a source of inspiration. This personal uncertainty led me to wonder if, and how, other women, especially abused women, dealt with this contradiction.

As I read more literature concerning wife abuse, I speculated upon how often this problem occurred among church-going Christian couples. Taking this inquiry a step further, I pondered if wife abuse was occurring in Mennonite homes. Although I had read little academic research specifically on wife abuse among Mennonites, I doubted that the Mennonite community was immune to this problem. In fact, in 1993, a survey was conducted of 550 Mennonite women who read Women's Concerns Report, and MCC publication. The respondents were asked to rank, in order of importance to them, 21 issues which the survey provided. The top ranked issue was domestic violence, while the fourth ranked concern was [sexual] abuse (Women's Concern's Report, 1993). The substantial concern and interest regarding issues of violence and abuse among Mennonite women, affirmed my belief that this was a significant problem that required studying.

To state that I began this research project with no assumptions or preconceived ideas would be untruthful. The first assumption I brought to this study was that gender is

an organizing category within society, and that, generally, women have been, and still are, in subordinate positions to men. As a result of this imbalance of power, male control over women, which has the potential to lead to violence against women, continues to be a very real problem.

In thinking about Mennonites specifically, I assumed that some Mennonite women were being abused by their husbands and that this behaviour, although not condoned by the Mennonite church, was not being actively condemned. Being raised in a Mennonite church, receiving biblical training at a Mennonite high school and Bible college, and observing the duties and responsibilities of men and women within the larger Mennonite conference, I was quite familiar with Mennonite theology, norms and values. I recognized that Mennonite theological teachings have traditionally been patriarchal and have encouraged traditional sex roles. I suspected that men's adherence to these beliefs may lead them to abuse their positions of power in their churches and families. Additionally, I speculated that women who held traditional religious beliefs would be in vulnerable positions with respect to abuse.

Selection of a Research Method

After selecting a topic, an important step in the research process is the selection of an appropriate technique or way of proceeding in gathering evidence (Harding, 1987). Choosing a method is a political choice because it allows the researcher to see things in a particular way (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Furthermore, how one conducts research is related to how one sees the world.

Most feminists would agree that there is no one feminist method or methodology (Jayarante & Wise, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1990, 1983; Klein, 1983). Feminist researchers should, however, use methods which are consistent with their research goals. Since women's experiences have been neglected and often silenced in traditional sociological research, many feminists, especially in the early stages of research, rely on a qualitative methodology. The method used most often is face-to-face interviewing. My research goal was to provide abused Mennonite women with an opportunity to speak at length in an informal, non-threatening environment about their experiences of abuse. I was also concerned to treat the women as research participants with much to contribute, not as subjects to be studied.

I was drawn to qualitative research methods and particularly impressed by feminist researchers such as Kirby and McKenna (1989), Stanley and Wise (1983, 1990) and Mies (1983). These authors criticized traditional social science methods and provided suggestions for pursuing feminist research. I was further attracted to feminist research because its goal is not only to study society, but to bring about change, thereby making research a political activity (Klein, 1983). This goal influenced my desire to do research which could contribute to the body of existing literature and shed some light onto the largely unspoken topic of wife abuse, for the sociological community, the Mennonite community, and for abused Mennonite women in particular.

In this study, I used a qualitative research design consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I selected this method because it seemed most consistent with my feminist "commitment to elucidating women's experiences from their own perspective"

(Bograd, 1988:21). Furthermore, it appeared to be the most conscientious way to obtain information about this personal and sensitive topic. Additionally, qualitative research helps situate the numbers and statistics obtained through quantitative research in their broader social and cultural contexts (McCracken, 1988). According to Seidman (1991), at the heart of interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Therefore, encouraging the women to speak about their experiences would allow me, and others who read this thesis to more fully understand Mennonite women's abuse experiences, and the ways in which women's religious beliefs and values affect how they interpret and cope with these experiences. Moreover, hearing and reporting the testimonies of abused Mennonite women is an effective way of making public private oppressions that have been hidden and/or denied for a long time.

In addition to feminist methods, I used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) "grounded theory" approach to guide the research process and the data analysis. According to the grounded theory approach, the research question is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied; it does not include statements about relationships between dependent and independent variables (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although there has been much research on the broad topic of wife abuse, there has been little research specifically on abuse and religion, and almost no qualitative research on highly religious women's experiences of abuse. Thus, my main concern was to study the phenomenon of abuse among Mennonites, not to provide hypotheses about the relationship between variables. This approach seemed appropriate for uncovering and understanding a phenomenon about

which little was known.

Data Gathering

My intention was to interview 10 Mennonite women who were currently, or formerly, in abusive marital relationships. I assumed that my sample would be obtained from the Fraser Valley, an area with a high concentration of Mennonites. I hoped to gain access to these women through referrals from Columbia Counselling Group, a Christian counselling agency in Clearbrook, and through advertisements in two popular Mennonite publications, the Mennonite Reporter and the Mennonite Brethren Herald (see Appendix 1).

Selection of Research Participants

Several months before I began interviewing participants I visited with a counsellor from the Columbia Counselling Group, presenting her with a letter outlining who I was and asking for volunteers for my study (see Appendix 2). The counsellor assured me that their organization had several clients who fit my criteria and said that she, together with her colleagues, would make efforts to contact potential participants for me. If the women decided to respond to my call for volunteers, they could contact me directly.

A second potential avenue for soliciting volunteers was through advertisements in Mennonite papers. As the first advertisement I placed in the Mennonite Reporter received no response, I decided against placing an ad in the Mennonite Brethren Herald. In retrospect, due to the subject matter of this research, it was not surprising that I received

no response to the advertisement. I decided to use word of mouth, hoping this method would be a more effective way to contact potential research participants. I told many people about the research I was doing, asking if they could refer anyone. I provided the same letter I had given the counselling agency to people who thought that they knew of women who might be interested in speaking with me (see Appendix 2).

I was able to interview nine formerly abused Mennonite women from the Fraser Valley. Interviews were conducted from April through August, 1993. Two of the participants were referred from the Columbia Counselling Group; the remaining seven women were provided to me through two key contact persons. The contact persons told the potential participants about the research I was doing, outlined my research criteria and assured the women of anonymity and confidentiality. If a woman agreed to be interviewed, the contact person provided me with her name and phone number and I called the participant. On the telephone I restated my research project, assured the woman of confidentiality and answered any questions she had. In addition, a time and place to conduct the interview was arranged.

Before describing the interview process, a further word about the selection of the research participants is needed. One of the contacts said that she knew of many more Mennonite women who had been abused by their husbands, but when she asked these women to speak with me they were unwilling. The contact related to me that this unwillingness stemmed from an uncertainty over who may have access to their stories and also a fear of talking about the abuse. I believe this fear was probably exacerbated by the secrecy surrounding this issue among Mennonites.

I had originally hoped to speak with women who were still in abusive relationships, but this criterion was not met. The reasons for this became more clear as I spoke with the research participants. Several women revealed that they had not defined themselves as abused wives while they were married. As one woman described:

> Even when I was in a relationship, and people would describe abuse, I would sit there in a conversation and say, "That's crazy, why doesn't she just get out?" and I was sitting there in the same situation.

Before the women could talk to others about their experiences, they needed to admit to themselves that they were, in fact, abused wives, which came with time and distance away from their abusers. Other women told me that they would have been unable to speak with me while they were married because their main concern was to make it through each day. The women stated that they lacked the energy and the courage, at that time, to speak up about the abuse. For these reasons, my sample consists only of formerly abused wives.

The Interviews

Several months before the actual data gathering began, I developed a semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix 3). My intention was to use it as a guideline, but not to be bound by the questions if departures seemed appropriate. Prior to interviewing actual research participants, I read the questionnaire to some women friends and used their questions and suggestions to improve the interview schedule.

All of the interviews, except one, took place in the women's homes. One interview took place in my car, in a park, because the woman's son was in the house and she did not

wish to speak with me in his presence. Before the interviews began the women and I usually spent a few minutes conversing. I provided some information about myself and explained how I came to be interested in this research. The women usually talked about themselves and their families as well. I informed the women of their rights as research participants and told them about my responsibilities as a researcher. An Informed Consent form was then signed by myself and the women (see Appendix 4).

During the first two interviews, the questionnaire I had developed was followed fairly closely. At that time, I was glad to have had a detailed questionnaire since I was somewhat nervous because of my inexperience at interviewing. The interview format underwent some revision soon after that. Since English was not the mother tongue of several of the research participants, I was concerned that asking the questions as they were originally worded might have been a little overwhelming for the women. In order to make the participants as comfortable as possible, I allowed the women to choose their interview format. Several women felt more comfortable telling me about themselves, their husbands and their abuse experiences rather than responding to my numerous questions. For the women who chose this option, I asked specific questions only as necessary during the interviews. This method worked well; I believe it helped put the women at ease and I was able to gather the information that I needed within a more relaxed and conversational atmosphere.

All of the interviews were tape recorded to avoid the distraction of taking notes during the interviews. I jotted down additional questions, which I would pose to the women when they finished talking, in order not to interrupt their train of thought. The

actual taped interviews lasted from ninety minutes to over three hours in length. In all cases, the time that I spent with the women extended well beyond that of the time required to complete the interviews. The women opened their hearts and their homes, providing me with food and drink in addition to sharing their stories with me.

I believe that being a Mennonite and having Mennonite contact persons was helpful in the process of locating women who would be willing to speak with me. The contact persons knew me well and supported the research I was doing. In a few cases, the women knew my family and that too seemed to help put them at ease, for I was not viewed as a stranger. As a result of the foundation that had been laid by the contact persons, rapport with the women seemed to come naturally. My familiarity with the German language was also helpful in a few interviews.

The honesty and trust the research participants displayed to me was surprising, but greatly appreciated. A number of women confided that the stories they had shared with me were more detailed than they had revealed to anyone else. I felt very privileged to have been entrusted with this highly personal and often very painful information.

Shortly after each interview was over, I wrote a journal entry in a notebook summarizing my impressions and recording additional information that might not have been tape recorded. This time of writing also served as a method of reflecting and debriefing after the interviews. Additionally I used the notebook to record research ideas, important dates and telephone calls, conversations with friends about the research, and my feelings about the progress of the project. By doing so, I was able to document much of the research process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is crucial to the overall ability of the researcher to describe and explain what is being studied. "The act of interpretation underlies the entire research process... interpretation exists at the beginning and continues throughout the entire process" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:23). This ongoing method of interpretation deviates from data analysis within traditional, quantitative social science research, which typically occurs only after all of the data has been gathered. Feminist methods and the grounded theory approach suggest that data gathering and analysis are interrelated and continually overlap (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). As my interviews were spread out over five months, I had much time to reflect on their structure and content. As a result of working with the data as soon as it was collected, I added a few questions to the original interview schedule during the data gathering process. As such, my reflections on, and awareness of, concepts and themes was ongoing and cumulative.

In order to maintain the women's anonymity and to ensure confidentiality, the names of the participants in this research were all changed. The women could provide a pseudonym if they desired; if not, one was given to them. The consent forms and the tapes have been kept in a locked cabinet to ensure that I have been the only one to have access to that information. After the completion of this thesis, all tapes and forms will be destroyed or given to the research participants if they desire them. The tapes were marked with a pseudonym and transcribed by myself using a dictaphone. After transcribing the interviews, a hard copy was produced and all nine interviews were placed in a binder, identified only by their pseudonyms.

In addition to reading over the transcriptions several times searching for important concepts and themes, I analyzed the data with the assistance of a computer program entitled "Textbase Alpha." This software program aided the coding process by allowing me to cut and paste excerpts from the women's interviews into categories which I created. Six broad categories were used to organize the data into thematic sections. These categories included outlining:

1. the abuse the women endured
2. how the women coped with the abuse and their reasons for remaining with their husbands
3. the women's views concerning marriage and divorce
4. the women's counselling experiences and advice received
5. theology/church's role in the women's experiences
6. suggestions for change and advice offered to other women by the research participants

Within each of the categories I looked for consistencies and contradictions between and within the women's experiences, beliefs and opinions.

Although I had formulated assumptions and ideas about the research before actually gathering the data, when I analyzed it, I attempted to allow what the data revealed to guide this process. This is a method of data analysis often used in a grounded theory approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that theory is created from the data, which means that hypotheses and concepts are derived from the data. This method of developing theory is an alternative to forcing data into pre-established theoretical categories. The creation of theory is viewed as a process; theory is an ever-developing

entity, not a perfect product.

My concern in the writing of this thesis was that I would, as accurately as possible, relate to the reader what the women said and felt about the various topics we discussed. Recognizing that the process of writing "constructs and controls meaning and interpretation" (DeVault, 1990:110), I have attempted to balance my desire to let the women's stories speak for themselves with the need to employ conceptual categories. Believing that this thesis should be grounded in the experiences of the women, I have included numerous quotations, thereby giving priority to their voices.

CHAPTER 4: THE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE AND ITS EFFECTS

In this chapter I provide some demographic and religious background information on the women and their husbands, and outline the women's abuse experiences, emphasizing their reasons for remaining with their husbands and their personal coping strategies. This chapter concludes with an examination of why and how the women's relationships ended. The women's abuse experiences included psychological manipulation and control, physical beatings and forced sexual encounters. Denial was the dominant coping mechanism used by the women, who remained with their husbands predominantly because they had been taught, and they believed, that marriage and family stability was very important and that divorce was wrong. Eventually, the women's relationships ended, some because of the women's decisions and others as a result of the men's actions.

Research Participants: Demographic Information

The participants in this study were nine formerly abused Mennonite wives. The length of marriage for these women ranged from 3 to 29 years, with a mean of 15 years. At the time of the interviews, none of the women were living with their abusive husbands. The duration of time spent apart from their husbands varied; the longest was a woman who had been divorced for 18 years, while the least amount was just over one year of separation. The current marital status of these women included four divorced women, four separated women and one widow. None of the separated women were expecting reconciliation with their husbands, nor were any of the women remarried or living with

men in common-law relationships. Since the time of the interviews, one woman has become engaged to another man.

The ages of the women in this study ranged from 23 to 56 years, with a mean age of 42. The highest educational level attained by four of the respondents was elementary schooling, two women had completed high school and two had received some college education. The ninth woman had not completed high school but had received a three-year Bible college diploma. Of the former husbands, five had some high school education and two had completed high school. One man had a Bachelor of Theology as well as some graduate level courses, and another had a two-year diploma.

All women worked outside of the home at some point in their married lives; the majority worked for wages throughout their marriages. Their jobs were predominantly low to medium paying (e.g. Nurse's Aide, secretary, house cleaner). The former husbands held mainly blue collar, labourer jobs, although one was a police officer. All nine former couples had between two and four children.

Family and Church Background

All of the women in this research project were raised in Mennonite homes. Three of the women were born in South America while one was born in Russia but moved to South America while young. These four spent their formative years in South America, raised in what they termed "strictly religious" and "conservative" Mennonite communities/colonies. Three of these women moved to Canada before they were married, in their late teens or early twenties. Another emigrated to Canada with her husband and

children several years after their marriage. The fifth research participant was born in Mexico, but raised in Canada. The remaining four respondents were born and raised in Canada.

Of the nine former husbands, four were raised as Mennonites, three of whom were born in South America. Four former husbands were raised as Roman Catholics, one of whom met his wife at a Bible college and later attended a Mennonite church and seminary. Another became a committed Christian during the time he was with his wife. The third attended church with his wife occasionally, and the fourth told his future wife he was a Christian, but he forbade her from attending church while they were married. The ninth former husband was raised with no religious affiliation. Although he attended a Mennonite church with his wife before they married, he later became critical of her church involvement.

All nine women spent their premarital years regularly attending conservative Mennonite churches, in which the majority were actively involved. Four of the women experienced times when their commitment to their faith wavered, typically when they were teens and/or young adults. After the women married, their church attendance and involvement changed somewhat. Four women attended church sporadically throughout their marriages. These interruptions were primarily created by their husbands who did not want them to go to church and made it very difficult for them to attend. As one woman stated, "he criticized me greatly for going and was very negative about any of my church friends." One woman's husband forbade her to go to church, and she did not attend church throughout their entire marriage. The remaining women attended various

Mennonite churches regularly throughout their marriages.

Of the couples who did attend church together, the men's involvement was limited to Sunday morning attendance. Several of the women expressed concern that their husbands may never have had personal life-changing experiences and thus were not true Christians. This was, however, something that the women were not aware of when they married their spouses.

At the time of the interviews, all of the women defined themselves as committed Christians. They stated that they attended church very regularly and were actively involved in various capacities within their churches. Six of the women attended Mennonite churches, one attended a Pentecostal church, one an Alliance church, and one woman attended both an Alliance and Mennonite church, but was not a member of either church. It is significant to note that at the time of the interviews, eight of the nine women were attending different churches than they had while they were together with their husbands. This aspect will be discussed in the next chapter. According to the research participants, four of the former husbands were still attending church, while four were not. The ninth husband had died.

The Women's Abuse Experiences

Within the wife abuse literature, various forms of abuse are documented, including: emotional, psychological, verbal, economic, physical and sexual. Typically, a husband will emotionally abuse and psychologically manipulate his wife before he physically or sexually violates her. Although emotional and verbal abuse do not necessarily lead to physical

abuse, the verbal abuse does seem to be a necessary precondition for this (Stets, 1990).

In order to give the reader a more comprehensive understanding of the types of abuse perpetuated by the women's husbands, a summary of the nine research participants' personal accounts of abuse is provided. The types and severity of the abuse the women endured will be described, as well as when the abuse started and how it changed over time.

Katherine[1]

Katherine stated that her husband's abuse started very soon after they were married. The abuse began as verbal insults and derogatory comments about her, and about women in general. Katherine related that this emotional abuse slowly began to wear away her self-esteem. Her husband used manipulation and blackmail to keep her subservient to him and to prevent her from telling others about his abusiveness. He also physically abused their children. Katherine felt that her husband physically abused the children as a way to keep her at home. The abuse of the children was also psychologically abusive for Katherine. Additionally, if Katherine attempted to stop her husband when he was yelling at or hitting the children, she would be slapped.

In this respect, the abuse escalated to include some physical assaults, but Katherine reported that she was predominantly subjected to sexual abuse; "that is when he would inflict pain." This sexual abuse included her husband tying her up and using weapons. Katherine's husband also committed adultery. Her husband's abusive behaviour continued through the couple's years of separation and escalated when the divorce proceedings were

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[1] In order to assure anonymity and confidentiality, all of the women's names have been changed.

underway. During that time, he had the telephones tapped, threatened to kidnap the children and attempted to kill her and the children.

Linda

For Linda, her husband's verbal abuse and criticism started three weeks after their wedding and continued throughout their marriage. She reported that her husband was extremely critical of her housework and her child-rearing skills. He repeatedly told her she was a "lazy slob," even though she worked very hard in the home as well as at her job outside the home. Her husband became increasingly psychologically manipulative, using verbal and non-verbal threats as a means to keep her insecure and docile. These threats included keeping a loaded gun by the bed and repeatedly stating that he would take the children from her by "proving" her an incompetent mother. Her husband also threatened to kill her, the children, and then himself. For Linda, the physical abuse, which started after the children were born, included "shoving, hitting, slapping, but never bruising. Lots of shaking, lots of grabbing and shaking." He physically abused the children when they were young, and she suspects that he also committed adultery.

Martha

Martha recalled that her husband's abusive behaviour started very shortly after her marriage; he was very cold to her. This progressed to him telling her she was ugly, and degrading her by not allowing her to visit with other adults when company was present. He told Martha that she could eat with the adults, but after the meal was completed she had to sit in another room and play with the children. Within seven years, her husband's behaviour escalated to physical abuse. This was so severe that Martha has had several

operations as a result of being kicked in the stomach with boots, and now constantly takes pain killers because of a damaged neck and back. Martha's husband also had an ongoing affair with a "friend" of hers. Eventually he left Martha to be with this other woman, taking with him their bank savings, most of which she had earned.

Arlene

Arlene's abuse experience was in the form of extreme emotional and sexual coldness. She revealed that her husband was an alcoholic and thus he had a difficult time holding down a job. She stated that her husband was rarely ever home, incurred many debts, lied to her to cover up his problems, even falsifying her signature to obtain money. Although Arlene was not beaten or severely criticized by her husband, his lack of affection, his deception, and constant drinking created an environment in which not only did she feel neglected and isolated, she was no longer able to trust her husband. In addition to the emotional distance, Arlene's husband also kept his sexual distance: "there was no sexual relationship at all between us because he was just, I guess, impotent or something, or just too drunk."

Sally

Sally reported that the mistreatment by her husband started early in their marriage. She had some trouble identifying this as abuse because it was "more manipulative....He was never really outright in what he said, ever....He was always more around the bush." He was verbally abusive, constantly criticizing her ability to keep the house clean and to raise the children properly. Moreover, he was verbally and physically abusive toward their oldest child. Sally stated that her husband also committed adultery and forced himself

upon Sally sexually. She recognized a few years after her separation that this behaviour was labelled marital rape.

Sarah

Sarah reported that the abuse in her marriage started "very soon, very soon." The initial abuse was in the form of controlling behaviours, manifested in economic deprivation. Sarah stated that she had to hold out her hand for every penny, even for necessities. She had one pair of nylons, two blouses and one skirt which she wore to church, summer and winter. This deprivation did not result from a lack of finances, but from her husband's control of all their money. As Sarah revealed, "we were married for seven and a half years and the money was only his and only on [sic] his name. I had absolutely no right to anything." His controlling behaviour was accompanied by constant criticism and arguing, which led to him pushing and slapping Sarah. She reported that when she eventually stood up to her husband, the violence towards her and the children stopped. As a result, for the last ten years of their marriage, Sarah related that there was no physical abuse, although her husband continued to emotionally abuse her. Sarah also stated that her husband had been unfaithful to her during their marriage.

Nancy

Nancy revealed that her husband's abuse began on their wedding day when he became extremely angry and began to swear at her. This behaviour, she reported, continued throughout their marriage. His criticism of her focused upon her housekeeping and child raising skills. Nancy stated that for ten years her husband did not work, for what he claimed were health reasons. Since their divorce he has worked, leading her to believe

that it was not his health that kept him home, but merely that he was lazy. Although her husband did not work for ten years, he did not do any of the house or yard work; he considered those to be Nancy's responsibilities. Nancy stated that she was the one who paid all the bills and provided for the family. Her husband, however, controlled the purse strings, leaving her with no spending money of her own.

The couple had only been married for five months when Nancy's husband started to beat her, and that too "never stopped." On one occasion, Nancy's husband attempted to strangle her with a towel, and another time he came after her with a large knife. The physical abuse left many bruises on her body and in one episode she received a cracked skull. In addition, her husband was extremely physically abusive to their oldest child. At one point he threatened that if she left him he would kill their child. Nancy called her husband a "sexaholic," because a few minutes after he beat her he would apologize in order to get her into the bedroom. If she protested, he yelled at her for hours, accusing her of flirting with other men.

Karen

Karen stated that her husband started being abusive toward her shortly after they were married. For her, "the verbal abuse was there constantly," and included swearing, yelling and continually belittling her. The physical abuse she endured consisted of several isolated incidents which involved her husband grabbing at and squeezing her neck, pushing, and throwing her against the wall. Near the end of the relationship, Karen's husband began to threaten her, saying that if she did not stay home from work, he would take the children, the car and their money. Karen was uncertain whether his threats were

merely idle, yet she related that they seemed very real to her. The threats, along with her husband's constant verbal abuse, created an environment in which Karen feared for her safety and sanity.

Jennifer

Jennifer experienced her husband's abuse for the first time about eighteen months into their marriage, after the birth of their first child. She recalled that his initial abuse consisted of criticizing and degrading her, and over time "the verbal abuse and the put downs became so unreal." A few years after the marriage began, Jennifer found that there was little communication between them and very little affection: "He wouldn't even sit in the same room with me for half an hour. We lived in the same house for four years like that." Jennifer's husband was extremely psychologically abusive; he threatened suicide many times, and once he manipulated a situation to a point where she thought he had actually killed himself. Jennifer stated that she feared her husband might "lose it" one day and kill them all. Although her husband did not directly hit her, he punched holes in walls and hit objects she was holding so that it hurt her. Jennifer stated that sexual activity was very rare between them and when it did occur it was never what she called "normal." Rather, it was "weird and crude." Her husband was also unfaithful to her.

The preceding summaries indicate that although there were many similarities, the abuse these women endured varied not only in type but also in severity. All of the husbands were emotionally and psychologically abusive toward their wives, and for most of the women, this was followed by physical and/or sexual abuse. Three women endured severe physical beatings during their marriages, and five women experienced moderate to

minimal amounts of physical abuse. Only one woman in this sample experienced no physical abuse by her husband. Six of the nine women encountered some form of sexual abuse from their husbands.

These findings are both consistent with what other research on Christians and abuse has documented, and also challenging to it. Alsdurf and Alsdurf's (1989) sample of 100 abused U.S. Christian women reported that emotional abuse and manipulation of Christian women was more frequent than physical abuse. Block's (1991) research revealed that most abuse experienced by Mennonites was not physical, but emotional. Block suggested that perhaps Mennonites were taking their non-violence doctrine seriously, at least with respect to physical abuse.

While I did not enumerate individual acts of emotional and physical abuse, the incidence of physical abuse appears to be greater than these other studies have suggested. Perhaps the discrepancy between Block's research findings and my own result from different methodologies: Block conducted telephone interviews and survey questionnaires, while this study used in-depth interviews. Moreover, a majority of the women I interviewed did so upon the recommendation of a mutual friend (as reported in Chapter 3). It is unlikely that these women would have provided a telephone interviewer with the detailed information about their lives which they shared with me. In addition, the gender of the interviewer may have influenced the amount of disclosure.

The Detrimental Effects of Psychological Abuse

Within our society and, according to Block (1991), within the Mennonite

community, physical abuse violates norms that emotional abuse does not. One woman who experienced little direct physical abuse proposed that her husband "knew that if he hit me it would be evidence," and thus his abuse was manifested mainly in psychological manipulation. Whether the women in this study were severely physically beaten or whether they experienced emotional abuse and manipulation, their husbands' actions were wrong. They violated the women's rights as individuals, let alone their rights and expectations as marriage partners.

The effects of psychological abuse on these women appeared to be equally destructive as the effects of physical and sexual abuse. The impact of the emotional abuse was reflected in the substantial amount of time the women spent detailing these experiences during the interviews. A common form of abuse the women suffered was verbal taunts and insults. Linda suggested that "people don't understand it; they don't understand what it's like to be yelled at for hours and hours." Sarah revealed that her husband "nearly picked me apart," referring to his constant criticizing of her. She stated that she felt as though she was held together solely by his scolding.

Karen distinguished between the types of abuse; her bruises from the physical abuse went away fairly quickly, but she still carried with her the emotional scars from the psychological manipulation. Katherine strongly felt that the

> emotional abuse is the one that's most detrimental because it opens up the door for the others. It takes away all your values ... it takes away your defense system. It's the one that takes the longest to get back.

The irony of emotional abuse is that it "is really hard because it is so subtle often, and it's

so hard to put your finger on." Clearly, the psychological abuse the women experienced was not merely an occasional argument or name-calling episode, but constant criticism and belittling.

Psychological abuse is less recognized in the literature on wife abuse and often not recognized at all in the law (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Consequently, "research on psychological abuse, because of its subtlety and subjectivity, is still in the exploratory stage" (DeGregoria, 1987:227). Most Canadian researchers have restricted their focus to physical abuse/violence, while acknowledging that emotional abuse is usually a precursor to physical violence (Smith, 1991; Dutton, 1988). The focus upon physical abuse within much of the literature would suggest that this form of abuse is more detrimental and more damaging than other types, or that it is the form of abuse taken most seriously. For research purposes, defining and explaining emotional and psychological abuse is more difficult and more subjective than physical abuse, and thus many researchers do not include it in their studies. Yet, it is important to learn how this abuse influences its victims. To more fully comprehend the dynamics of an abusive relationship, one must understand that

> physical battering is but one in an arsenal of coercive control techniques that are deployed against the victim, creating an overall context that is synergetically greater than the sum of its components (Okun, 1986:121).

Economic deprivation and control is often placed within the larger category of emotional/psychological abuse (Sinclair, 1985; Walker, 1979). For all of the women in this study, their husbands' control of the money was a daily reality. In three cases, the

women primarily financially supported their families, yet their husbands demanded that they be in charge of the money. Several women reported that they had to "beg for every penny" they needed, even for necessities. Sarah recalled that although she worked outside of the home, she felt as though she "had absolutely no right to anything." Another woman went so far as to keep a log of how much money she spent, where she spent it, and why she spent it, because her husband repeatedly accused her of spending money frivolously. Katherine's experience was typical of the other women's:

> He figured that the money he made was his to do with as he wanted to. He would give me a certain amount for groceries and that had to do. The last year I insisted on having $15 every two weeks as spending money just for myself. He was furious about that, I had no right to demand that.... He was the only one working in his eyes.

In addition to controlling the money, some husbands controlled their wives' activities, such as who the women visited, how they acted, monitoring or forbidding long distance telephone calls, or forbidding the women to go out unless it was to their places of employment. As a result of their monitored and restricted movement, these women experienced a sense of isolation and alienation from others. Without exception, the women recalled that soon after their marriages, they lost touch with many of their friends. They stopped having their friends over because their husbands disliked them and/or were very cold toward them. One husband even forbade his wife's sister from visiting the house. As Jennifer recalled, "I had alienated all my friends because even if they were over when he was home, he would just stomp through the kitchen, he wouldn't look at them, say hi to them, nothing."

These actions were used by the men to ensure that their wives cut ties to their support networks, thereby leaving them isolated and vulnerable (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). For many women, lacking the support and/or contact of friends and families, their husband's words and responses became the primary means by which they evaluated themselves. The isolation of the women worked to "establish a sense of guilt in the victim and reinforce the belief that psychological and physical abuse is justified" (Romero, 1985:542). Moreover, abusers use their power to control and manipulate their victim's perceptions of reality (Finkelhor, 1983). Finkelhor argues that isolation is an effective abuse tactic because women who are isolated lack contact with the outside world to provide perceptions about themselves that differ from their husbands'. As a result, "the distortion of reality and self-image is generally one of the most devastating effects" of abuse (Finkelhor, 1983:20).

This distorted reality was clearly verbalized by the women in this study. Not only did the women begin to doubt their own judgments, they began to question their own worth. Linda explained:

> He's very good at talking, he can make you doubt anything. It got so bad, obviously I am exaggerating, but even if I had looked out and it was day time and he would say it would be night, I would doubt it. I wouldn't trust myself. He could talk on and on and on, and wear me down. Get you so tired you would agree to anything, either to shut him up or avoid him getting really angry.

After being criticized repeatedly, the women began to believe that they were "lazy," "stupid" and "crazy," just as their husbands had told them they were. Martha revealed: "as I got married and it turned out this way, I didn't feel just ugly, I felt stupid. I

had no opinion about myself and he took all that away from me." Karen's husband's criticizing was so powerful that she experienced a complete lack of self-confidence:

> When you are belittled like that all the time you feel like nothing.... I can honestly say that during the time that I was married I felt, and I almost could say that I was, a nothing.

The women experienced a contradiction within their marriages. Their husbands could be loving and kind, yet they were often very critical and mean to them. The fact that the abusive husband plays this dual role "poses tremendous psychological difficulties for the victim" (Okun, 1986:119). This was manifested in a theme which each woman reiterated, that at some point in their relationships they thought that they were going crazy. The women reported that they lost confidence in their ability to make decisions, even the simplest tasks became a challenge. Arlene was so frustrated with her situation, she felt that she was on the verge of losing her mind. Sarah experienced similar feelings, "I have had times where I thought I was totalled. I thought I would end up in a mental institution." Katherine described her situation as such: "It almost becomes like the home runs on an abnormal level and you're not quite sure where the sanity is." She started to believe that her husband was normal and she was crazy. Jennifer stated, "I thought I was going crazy. That is when I thought, this is it, how much more can happen before something really bad happens?" The combined effects of the psychological, emotional and verbal threats and manipulations can literally make women feel as though they are crazy, an experience well documented in the literature on wife abuse (Martin, 1981; MacLeod, 1980).

Concomitant with a loss of self-esteem and feeling as though they were going

crazy, the women began to accept responsibility for their husbands' abusive behaviours. The women reported that during their marriages they believed they were largely to blame for the abuse they were experiencing. It was their husbands who convinced them to believe this. According to Linda's husband, if she would do as she was told, he would not have to be violent. He stated that if only she would "smarten up," everything would be fine. Sally explained that her husband would rationalize and excuse his actions by finding a way to make her appear wrong. Nancy reported that her husband justified his actions by saying: "You make me angry and you ask for it," and thus the violence was always her fault. Even after the marriage was over, Nancy's husband still placed the blame for their problems on her. He argued that it was 99.9% her fault that the marriage did not work out, claiming: "If you would have been better it could have worked and the kids would have been different."

The men's words were effective; the women felt responsible for the abuse their husbands inflicted. This sense of guilt was perpetuated by the women's low self-image. As Martha recalled, "I thought I was that bad ... I am the one that wrecks the marriage, I am such a bad wife, I am such a bad mother." This low self-esteem was echoed by Jennifer: "I was feeling so bad about myself, it was almost like I didn't deserve more." Jennifer was almost convinced that the treatment she was receiving was fair and appropriate. Linda reported that it took her a long time to realize that the abuse was not her fault. "He could be so charming to other people, and all that, so you figure it must be [you]." Several of the women stated that prior to marrying their husbands, they had low self-esteem, which originated in their childhood. The women's negative self-image was

reinforced by their husbands.

Several women mentioned that working outside of the home was helpful because it enabled them to maintain a semblance of self-worth. Work provided a place of peace, and a time to forget about the troubles at home. Linda stated that she had a very responsible job and therefore could not understand how she "could screw up so badly at home." It was this ongoing contradiction that made her think she "must be losing it." Although Karen knew that she was a good person, she did not know where that good person was during her marriage. "My husband couldn't see it, so where could it be?"

Once the women were no longer with their husbands, the self-blame they had experienced decreased and, in some cases, was no longer an issue as they realized that their husbands' abusive behaviour was not their fault. This decrease in self-blame is consistent with research which found that over half of the women who were currently living with violent spouses blamed themselves for the violence inflicted upon them, whereas only a small proportion of those who no longer lived with their abusers blamed themselves for past violence (Andrews & Brewin, 1990).

Traditional Values and Socialization

The women in this study were faced with the dual pressures and expectations of religious norms and societal values. These socialization processes informed and reinforced one another, sending the women strong messages about how they should act and react as women, and as Christian wives. A traditional, patriarchal understanding of a woman's role in the home places responsibility on her for keeping the family together, pleasing her

husband, and raising the children. If the husband is abusive, the implicit assumption, and often the outright accusation, is that the wife must be doing, or not doing, something to provoke this behaviour. Thus, if there are problems within a family, the blame typically falls upon the woman.

This traditional perspective has been perpetuated by the church, whose roots are deeply patriarchal. A woman's primary responsibility in her marriage, religiously speaking, is to be submissive to her husband. If she fails, it is grounds for abuse, justified as discipline (Shupe et al., 1987). Men, in turn, may use religion to defend their use of violence. They may appeal to the Bible and to their right as the head of the house to force their wives' compliance to their demands.

Evidence exists within the wife abuse literature that men who abuse their wives are more likely to adhere to a traditional sex role ideology than men who do not abuse their wives (Smith, 1991; Walker, 1979). One aspect of this view is the belief that a man's wife is his possession. The idea of wives as property has a long history, its origins dating back to Roman law, with justification in Christian scriptures and theology (as outlined in Chapter 2). Since Christian teachings require women to submit to their husbands, women are left with little recourse if they are married to abusive men.

The research participants reported that their husbands held traditional views concerning men's and women's roles within the family. Katherine's husband stated, on more than one occasion, "I own you and you will do as you are told." He has continued to make this claim even though the two have been divorced for six years. Nancy's husband similarly proclaimed his ownership rights: "You are my wife, I can do what I

want. You must be submissive to me." Karen related that her husband's behaviour and attitude changed after their marriage. His attitude was: "I got you now, I don't have to impress you."

Traditional sex role socialization has rigidly defined roles for men and women. Women are expected to care for and nurture their families, while men are expected to financially provide for their families in the work world. In this sample, none of the husbands helped their wives with household duties such as cooking, cleaning and child care. One woman recalled that when she asked her husband for help in the kitchen, he stated, "I am not a woman, why should I help you?" This woman did, however, also have a job outside of the home. Karen's husband's behaviour was not atypical of the rest of the men:

> He would get off his work clothes, lay on the couch, and wait for dinner; I was supposed to bring it. And he watches TV from the time he gets home from work to the time he goes to bed.

All of the women worked, in and outside of the home, while four of the men rarely held down paid jobs. Several of the women stated that their husbands forced them to work, and one husband forced his wife to return to work sooner than she wanted to, after the birth of her child. Nancy's husband did not work for ten years of their marriage. Martha claimed that her husband did not like working, so she had to work very hard. Martha's husband admitted, after the marriage ended, that he had stayed with her as long as he did because she was a hard worker, and thus he did not have to work. These examples suggest that the men considered their wives to be subservient persons, people

whom they could dominate and intimidate by virtue of their position as heads of their households.

Women's Decisions to Remain: Contributing Factors

The participants in this study stated that there were many factors which played a role in their decisions to remain with their husbands.[2] Not only did these reasons keep the women in relationships with their husbands, but they motivated the women to actively work to change their marriages and their husbands. Personal, social, economic and religious factors were interwoven in the women's decision-making processes. A common social and personal reason that several women stated was that they did not want their children to be raised without a father, believing that a bad father was better than none. A number of women stated that they desired to rescue their husbands, to help them change and to realize their potential. This concern for their husbands prompted the women to remain with them, ever hoping that they would become better persons.

In addition, all of the women reported that at various times during their marriages, they feared for their lives and for the lives of their children, should they attempt to leave. Moreover, a few of the participants stated that their husbands' threats and blackmail kept them docile and subservient, making it difficult for them to envision leaving.

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[2] Many books which deal with the issue of wife abuse devote a chapter to this issue, usually entitled, "Why do the women stay?" Several feminist authors have pointed out that this question places the blame on women, suggesting that if the women really desired to get out of their relationships, they should just leave. I am in agreement with feminists that this question is phrased inappropriately, and wanted to be careful not to place the blame on the research participants by asking them why they stayed with their husbands. During the first interview, however, the woman suggested that this was a valid and important question that she thought should be asked. As a result, I included it in my interviews.

Only one woman stated that economic reasons factored into her decision to remain with her husband. This reason, she revealed, was based more on a fear instilled in her by her husband than on her actual financial situation. For a majority of the women, economic dependence on their husbands was not a factor that prevented them from leaving because they had paid employment outside of their homes. In fact, several women would likely have been better off financially if they had left their husbands.

I do not wish to detract from the reasons the women stated above, nor is it my intention to downplay the destructive means the husbands used to keep their wives submissive and unable to act. However, the women's reluctance to end their marriages appeared to be predominantly religiously generated. Interwoven with the religious factors are social norms, which have largely been informed by religious values. Furthermore, the women's membership in the Mennonite community influenced how they perceived their marital roles and their belief in marital permanence.

All of the women persevered within their marriages, turning to separation and divorce only as a last resort. In fact, only four women actually decided to leave their husbands. Katherine was ever willing to work at the relationship; her attitude was simply: "Let's see what we can do, how can we pull this back together? Because my belief was that you are married for life." Karen also recalled, "I was just trying to do everything that would make the marriage work." Although their relationships were far from healthy, several women recalled that they had never even thought of separation as an option. Sarah claimed, "I honestly believed that it just had to last."

A commitment to their marriage vow seemed to be a driving force in the women's

perseverance with their relationships. The women had put much effort and self-sacrifice into their marriages and thus did not wish to see them end. "You want your marriage to work so badly." Moreover, the women were raised to believe that divorce was wrong, and many of them had accepted that teaching. Jennifer stated: "I really very strongly believed in a commitment to marriage." At the time of the interview she still believed that divorce was wrong, but suggested that there were exceptions. Karen repeatedly reminded herself of the vows she had made in front of God, her church, and family and friends:

> I made the commitment and I was going to stick through it and that was a constant thing I always said, over and over again, I am going to stick through it.

Additionally, a deep love for their husbands was an important factor. As Karen recalled, "I had so much love for him, I really thought he would never do it [hit] again, ever." This love sustained the women's hope and belief that their husbands would change: "Maybe it will go away, it will change, it will change." Linda suggested that she maintained hope for many years because for her, Christian faith was rooted in the concept of hope.

The women's reasons for remaining with their husbands were consistent with research findings by Pagelow (1981). Pagelow found a strong correlation between the willingness of women to stay in battering relationships without retaliating, and their strong commitment to traditional patriarchal ideology. In addition, women remained with their abusers because of their investments in their marital relationships.

As Christian women with a strong belief in God's authority, several women sought God's guidance and assistance. Martha confessed, "I always thought that [he] would change and I prayed for him all the time, that he would change." She also encouraged her

children to pray for their father, something other women also reported that they did. The women's concern for reinforcing respect for the father-husband figure was related to traditional theological teachings of keeping families intact and projecting a positive image of the father to the children (Hoff, 1990). Linda also prayed for change; she prayed that her husband's heart would be softened, but to no avail. Although their prayers were not answered in the ways that the women hoped, they continued to struggle for their relationships' survival.

The women stayed with their husbands because they felt it was their responsibility and their Christian duty. Moreover, because they internalized the belief that the maintenance of the family unit was dependent upon their efforts, they felt at fault if their marriages ended. According to Scutt (1983:131), many women feel that, "if the marriage breaks down, this is a personal failure for women, not a mutual failing or a failure of the institution itself." Taking this argument one step further, for these committed Christian women, their marital failure was not only a failure for them as **women**, but for them as **Christian women** and as **Mennonite wives**. They felt that this was both a social and spiritual failure, which reinforced their sense of guilt and self-blame.

Karen spoke of her on-going struggle with residual guilt feelings:

> I know I feel guilty. I feel in the back of my mind that I could have done something different to maybe make the marriage work. Then the front of my mind and the knowledge and the brain that I do use daily knows I could not have changed anything. It is just that way of thinking that you have been trained to be, [as] a Mennonite conservative person.

Hoping to avoid dealing with this guilt, one woman admitted that she had occasionally

prayed that her husband would die because that would have provided a "legitimate" way out of her marriage. Similarly, Arlene stated, "People might not understand, but I was thankful to God when he did die." For some time, several of the women perceived their spouse's death to be the only way out of their destructive relationships. Prior to arriving at this point of despair, all of the women attempted in various ways to maintain some control and power over their relationships. In fact, refusing to despair is itself an act of resistance (Koontz, 1992).

Coping Strategies

Traditional sex role socialization and cultural values had taught these women that their primary source of fulfilment was to be their marriages. "If a woman accepts this premise, she will take great pride in a good marriage, and often takes full responsibility for a bad one" (Martin, 1981:81). The women believed that they were responsible for maintaining family harmony. Thus, not wanting to take the responsibility for a failed marriage, they actively attempted to change their situation while maintaining the pretence of a happy family.

The research participants expressed that their initial response to their husband's emotional and psychological abuse was to attempt to please their husbands. One of the ways they attempted to do so was to change themselves. As one woman stated, "I wanted to do anything I could to change me. Anything I could do to help ... [but] ... I could never measure up to what he wanted me to be." The women's best efforts rarely produced a change in their husbands' behaviour. Jennifer felt that making her husband happy was an

impossible task because he was never happy. Linda's words describe this inability to please:

> It's humanly impossible to keep every area of your life perfect but I would try. I would try to keep the kids spotless and happy when he would be home. The house would be perfect, the meals would be wonderful, but he would always find something.

The women stated that if their husbands could not find something wrong in one area, they looked to another area. Consequently, "the level of complaining was always the same." The women's inability to please their husbands suggests that the women were doing all they could, but that their husbands were making unreasonable demands.

Appeasement, rather than passive resistance, is often the goal of abused women (Russell, 1982). The women attempted to pacify their husbands in order to end their abusiveness: "I tried to do what he wanted me to do." One method of appeasement was to "consent to a lesser pain to avoid a greater pain." For most women this meant consenting to unwanted sex, or undesirable sexual acts. Several women stated that they went without many material possessions, even necessities, in order to avoid an argument and a potential beating. Conversely, other women spoke of coping with their situation by picking a fight with their husbands. By provoking the argument, it would be over sooner and the women had some control over its timing.

For Sarah, a way to cope with her husband's abusive behaviour was to remain silent; she did not verbally or physically defend herself when she was being yelled at. Similarly, Nancy recalled that the first time her husband hit her she just cried. For years, she said and did nothing as her husband abused her: "He would beat me and yell at me

until 3 o'clock at night and I wouldn't say one word." However, after six years of this treatment, Nancy confessed that she began to yell back.

According to Walker's research, "it usually takes physical abuse before a woman will admit that she is being battered. Even the most extreme form of psychological terror is excused" (1979:80). All of the women in this study revealed that they lived in denial, some for many years, not admitting to themselves, or to others, that their husbands abused them. This denial was a method of survival for the women. In order to maintain hope in the success of their relationships, the women had to excuse or minimize most, if not all, of the abuse they experienced. As Linda revealed, "I never let myself think that I was being terrorized ... I never thought it through. I was in denial." She stated that, in her mind, she rationalized away her husband's abuse.

As part of living with their denial, the women covered up their husbands' abuse in public. Katherine explained: "Our marriage was a perfect marriage to everybody, and I helped to make it look that way." The women's ability to deny was so deeply rooted that several women only admitted to themselves and to others that they had been abused after their relationships ended. Katherine recognized that she had been in an abusive marriage two years after her separation, when she read a checklist of abusive behaviours. Although she knew that her relationship had problems, she stated, "I had never labelled it that before." Linda reported: "It's really only in the last year that I have been able to say that I have been abused. I never used that terminology. I said we didn't get along." In the most extreme case, one woman admitted to what had happened in her marriage only 15 years after her divorce. Martha stated that she never told anyone that her husband beat her,

even when the outcome of his violence was hospitalization. She reported that her desire to protect her husband was what motivated her silence.

A very significant factor in the women's denial was shame. This shame was verbalized by a few women, who expressed a sense of failure because their marriages were not as wonderful as they should have been. The shame was compounded by the women's pride. As Jennifer verbalized, "I think I had a lot of pride too, I didn't want to admit that this was going on, tell anybody." This pride and shame was motivated by the women's guilt and self-blame. As Sally recalled, "I had always blamed myself for all of it, for after all, I am the key to holding this thing together, right, so it is all my fault." Arlene regretfully related, "I did the best I could ... I did all I could ... to keep our marriage together, to keep the family together but it just didn't work out."

Denial of the abuse was a necessary coping strategy for the research participants. It was needed so that the women could accomplish their daily tasks. Several women explained that their energy and strength were consumed just getting through each day. Katherine's analogy provides some insight into what that process was like:

> At that time it was almost like being at war. If you talk to a soldier in a war zone, the only thing that they think of is survival and that's basically what you are doing in an abusive relationship. You are just surviving.

In part, the women were unable to define themselves as abused because the admission would require action. Linda recalled: "If you admit that it is bad then you have to do something about it, right? So it's easier to say that it's not so bad." Jennifer felt that to speak the words would admit that it was true, and therefore it was easier to live in

denial. Although denying the abuse was necessary for the women to cope, one of the consequences of this constant negation of the truth was that "you deny your feelings, you deny everything. Your whole life becomes a lie, your own life becomes a lie."

The women in this study were negatively affected by the abuse and their denial of it. However, they were not passive, helpless victims during their marriages. The women were active agents, struggling within their oppressive and dangerous environments to create a safe place for themselves and their children. The women's energy and focus was on keeping the marriage together and protecting the safety of their children and themselves. Subsequently, that often meant the women needed to distance themselves, both emotionally and physically, from their abusers. Several women did so, leaving the house for a day, a week or a few months. Two women in this study fled for their lives on several occasions. Several women asked their husbands to leave the house, with minor success, and two involved the police, who arrested their husbands. These actions were typically a last resort for the women, and provided temporary relief from their pervasive problems.

The End of the Relationships

After many years of enduring, hoping and trying, there came a time when a number of the women finally decided that their marriages had no future. Four women actively determined their own fates by deciding to leave their husbands. This was not a decision made hastily, each of these women had left their husbands at least once before the final separation. One woman finally left her husband ten years after the first time she fled from

her home.

The reasons the four women gave for deciding to separate from their abusers varied. Three women stated that their reasons for leaving were strongly influenced by their children. When the women recognized the detrimental effects their husbands and the abusive home environments were having on their children, they realized that they needed to terminate their marriages. However, it usually took a severe beating or an unusual incident for the women to take the final step out the door. The women's concerns for their safety and their own sanity were precipitating factors in their decisions to leave. Karen explained it this way:

> There is only so much you can handle. If your brain starts wondering who you are and what you are doing here and why you are suffering through all this. You shouldn't have to live like that everyday.

For four women in this study, the termination of their marriages hinged upon their husbands' actions. These men left their wives, two of them for other women. The third man left his wife after she said she needed to be away from him for the weekend. Although he left his wife, he told friends and co-workers that his wife left him. The fourth husband left his wife for several weeks on several occasions, and on one of these occasions she found him in bed with another woman. That is when the relationship ended for good. For the ninth woman, her relationship ended when her husband died, although, at the time, he was no longer living with his wife, at her request.

Prior to arriving at this conclusion, the women sought help for themselves and for their relationships. Calling upon others for assistance was an important step in

acknowledging that a problem existed and in working toward change. Moreover, it was another example of the women's active resistance to their husbands' abuse. The following chapter will explore this aspect of the women's abuse experiences, with an emphasis on the women's experiences within their churches.

CHAPTER 5: THE WOMEN'S HELP SEEKING EXPERIENCES

In this chapter, I examine the women's experiences of seeking help and outline the advice they received. Various church teachings that deterred the women from leaving their abusive relationships will also be discussed, as well as the women's journeys toward healing and wholeness. The women had mixed experiences with counsellors and church pastors. Generally, the advice they received during their marriages did not help them cope with the abuse, and in several cases it was detrimental. However, they obtained more effective advice after their relationships terminated. Typically, the women grappled with their abuse experiences on their own, receiving strength and courage from their personal faith in God.

Potential Support Networks

During the course of their marriages, the women attempted to change themselves and their husbands in order to stop their husbands' abusive behaviours. This approach met with little success. Thus, it would seem logical for these women to turn to their support networks, friends and family members, for help. This, however, was generally not the case for the participants in this study. These women were cautious about telling others of their experiences. In fact, all of the women stated that they tried to keep information about their abuse from their families and friends. If others found out, the women's initial response was to protect their husbands by denying or minimizing the abuse. Not only did the women do this to protect their husbands, but they desired to protect others from the

truth. Several women reported that even after their parents or friends found out about the abuse, the women "still tried to shield them" from all of the details.

In addition to their desire to protect their husbands and families, the women covered up the abuse because they felt ashamed. Additionally, they felt that they needed to guard themselves against the ill thoughts of others. Several of the women in this study expressed concern for how they appeared to others in the church: "I wanted people to think good of us." This concern over what others would think of them kept the women silent. Sarah recalled, "I was too proud. I didn't want people to know." This pride placed a cheerful smile on her face as she arrived at church, when only minutes earlier her face was tear stained because her husband had severely verbally abused her. This pride was likely a result of the shame she and other women felt over their less then perfect marriages. In order to maintain the illusion of happy families, the women suffered in silence. This silent suffering was a message that Martha, who defined her upbringing as "strictly religious," learned as a young child. She stated that in her community, if women were abused by their husbands, it was not talked about; the women lived with their pain quietly.

Furthermore, the women's silence was compounded by a fear of placing themselves in an emotionally vulnerable position by telling others. The women felt that others would not understand their problems or could not relate to their experience. Jennifer stated, "I think for friends and family too, nobody really dealt with this before. I didn't have someone that would identify with me." Though Jennifer's family recognized that things were not right in her marriage, they did not actively seek to assist her. "It was like I had

died; they sensed that, yet they were afraid to ask. They didn't want to open a can of worms." The family, although concerned for her, did not know what to do, and did not wish to interfere in the marital relationship. This uncertainty concerning how to assist an abused woman appeared to be a common response:

> A lot of them said later, "I just wanted to pick you up out of there and take you home." But nobody really stepped into the situation at any time, not even his parents.

If, and when, the women did tell friends and family members about their husbands' abuse, typically they were met with responses which blamed them for their problems. One woman related a typical "blame the victim" response:

> I tried to share it with my sister and her attitude was simply, you have to give him everything that he wants or else he's going to go elsewhere for it and it is your fault.

Arlene was also faced with family members who essentially accused her of being responsible for her husband's behaviour. She told her sister-in-law about her problems, and her sister-in-law wrote back suggesting, "maybe you haven't made your home attractive enough for him; maybe you haven't been there when he needed you." Furthermore, Arlene's mother-in-law reminded her that she had promised "`til death do you part," after Arlene asked her alcoholic and untrustworthy husband to leave the home until he quit drinking. Arlene stated that she received no support for this decision, one which she felt was long overdue. For her, it was a last resort after all attempts at getting her husband to change had failed.

Jennifer recalled that her father had once said that if a husband was unhappy it was the wife's fault. Although he was not referring to her relationship, this attitude made it

difficult for Jennifer to confide in her parents, and she felt indirectly blamed for her husband's abusive behaviours. Thus, when the women eventually gathered the courage to tell others or to ask for help and they were confronted with blame, their personal guilt and shame were intensified. The women's secrecy and fear of confiding, although influenced by their personal shame, were compounded by their upbringing and involvement in what were supposed to be peaceful Mennonite church communities. These factors worked in concert to reinforce the women's silence and to perpetuate their shame.

Of the nine women in this study, only Karen directly sought outside help after the first physically abusive incident. She telephoned a girlfriend. More commonly, family members and friends learned about the abuse years after it began, or only after the women's relationships ended. When information about the seriousness of the husbands' abuse was known, families and friends were then usually supportive of the women's decision to leave their husbands. If the women's husbands left them, support was in the form of consolation that the women were better off without their husbands. Jennifer's family, upon hearing about her husband's abusiveness, showed their support by wondering why Jennifer had returned to her husband after the first separation. One woman, however, revealed that her family did not believe her husband had abused her. She has continued to live with their disbelief. Moreover, she received almost no emotional or financial support from her family or Mennonite community after they separated. Other women reported that some family members believed their abuse accounts and supported their decisions, while other family members did not.

Several women expressed disappointment and frustration that they had received

little help from their friends and family members. Conversely, other women stated that they did not ask for much help and thus could not fault others for their lack of assistance. The general absence of help was excused by the women because they felt that other people did not have the education or training to deal with this problem. As Katherine stated, her family supported her as much as they could, but "they just didn't know what to do. None of us are trained."

The women revealed that they were still cautious about to whom they spoke; most of them had not told many people about their past abuse. Katherine explained that before she would tell someone about her abuse experiences, there had to be a level of trust and openness.

> The thing is, when you try to share, you test thegrounds, you don't just come out and say, he did.... You just don't do that. You sort of say little things and you watch the other person's reaction and if they shut down, you shut down.

In the hopes of finding persons they could confide in, the women explored other avenues of help.

Counselling Advice

All of the women in this study obtained some form of counselling during their marriages. The women sought help from therapists, community services agents, mental health professionals and school counsellors. Pastoral advice was also sought; this help seeking will be detailed later in this chapter.

Linda's words, regarding the effectiveness of these professionals in providing

assistance, summarized other women's experiences: "I have had a lot of good help from counsellors and some really bad help." The most common complaint about these professionals was that they did not discern the seriousness of the couples' problems, nor determine the extent of the abuse the husbands were inflicting. All but one of the women admitted that they tended to minimize their problems when they spoke with counsellors. Advice given based on partial information was not helpful to the women and thus they were generally disappointed with their help-seeking experiences.

The one woman who did not minimize her husband's abusiveness told her son's principal and school counsellor because she "wanted to get somebody involved." Nancy's husband did not only beat her, he was very physically abusive toward their child. Because she told authorities at the school, a social worker became involved as well as the police. Nancy stated that she was pleased with the assistance and advice she received for her son and for herself.

The women who sought help from trained counsellors, who were predominantly males, stated that most of the counsellors focused upon changing the women's behaviour rather than attempting to determine and change their husbands' actions. One woman told of a counsellor who advised her to wear more make-up and buy a new dress in order to help the marriage. One woman revealed that her counsellor told her to divorce her husband: "Get rid of him, and get on with your life." This was advice, however, that she did not consider to be an option at the time it was given. Sadly, another counsellor could not deal with, and thus did not even want to hear, one woman's experiences of sexual abuse in her marriage.

Typically, the women initiated counselling on their own, and then asked their husbands to accompany them. After much begging, the men reluctantly accompanied them, but "as soon as things started to get a little bit normal again" the men stopped going, arguing that they no longer needed counselling. Furthermore, some of the women found that going to counselling with their husbands was ineffective because the men were able to manipulate the conversations so that their wives appeared to be the cause of the problems. As a result, several women had to defend themselves to their counsellors, who seemed to have turned against them.

It appears that many of these counsellors lacked the skills required for dealing with abusive relationships and that it was the women who suffered as a result. A few women did express that they found some counsellors helpful because the women learned more about themselves. For most of the women, effective and helpful counselling was obtained only after their marriages had ended. At that time, the women obtained counselling for themselves, not for their relationships. The women stated that the most helpful counsellors were those who believed the women's stories, did not minimize the abuse, and who focused on the women themselves and their self-esteem. Of the women who had received advice from both male and female counsellors, generally, they found female counsellors to be more effective.

Pastoral Advice

In addition to receiving help from psychologically trained professionals, each of the women sought help from their churches. Ideally, the church should have been a place for

these women to discuss their problems and to be accepted and supported. The reality of their experiences was not that encouraging.

The women admitted that they also minimized their husbands' abusiveness when they spoke with pastors. As Jennifer proposed: "I think when people visit pastors they try to make things nicer sometimes than they really are." The women seemed concerned not to speak too negatively about their former husbands to their families and friends, and to counsellors and pastors. The women were bound by what they perceived to be their duty as good Christian wives. This duty required that they not speak unkind words about their husbands, thereby denying the women their right to speak truthfully about their experiences. This concern for "pleasant talk" was reinforced by others within the church. One woman was told by a pastor's wife that she should "speak no evil" about her husband. If the women could not speak honestly about their husbands, their likelihood of obtaining help was greatly reduced. Ultimately, this partial truth telling was harmful to the women because they received advice based upon incomplete information.

Martha stated that her husband was extremely abusive and had attempted to get rid of her so that he could be with his girlfriend. She sought counsel from the church: "I asked the pastor, `Should I rather allow him to commit killing me?' They said, `You stay with him even if he kills you.'" Furthermore, Martha was asked to leave the Mennonite church she was attending when she became separated. It seems extremely unjust that her husband, who was in an adulterous relationship and was physically violent, was not disciplined by the church, while Martha was essentially thrown out of her church.

The reason for this treatment may have been because Martha did not tell her pastor

the details of her separation; she never told her church that her husband beat her or that he had actually left her for another woman. Subsequently, when Martha's husband pressured her for a divorce, she sought advice from Pentecostal and Mennonite church pastors. She was told, in no uncertain terms, by a Pentecostal pastor, that there was "NO forgiveness for divorced people, none." This message was echoed by various Mennonite pastors, although not as forcefully. Consequently, she was very reluctant to give her husband a divorce, fearing eternal damnation for doing so. This belief in the irredeemable sinfulness of divorce was also verbalized by Martha's mother-in-law. Although this occurred almost 20 years ago, Martha reported that she still felt stigmatized by many of the traditional Mennonites she encountered because she was divorced.

Arlene related that when she sought advice for her problems, her Mennonite pastor emphasized the biblical principle of the man as the head of the house. She had trouble with this advice, she stated, since she was the one working and feeding him and the children. For several years her husband had not contributed any money to the family. Arlene stated that the pastor was willing to try to help her husband quit drinking, yet no one asked her if she needed any help. She was very disappointed with her church leaders, who failed to recognize that she was suffering because of her husband's actions.

Sarah explained that after many years of living with her abusive husband, a pastor finally came to her house and asked if she and her husband did not want to "throw all of their problems onto a pile and start over again." She found this advice unhelpful and premature, since they had not even begun to determine or discuss the cause(s) of their problems. Sarah was advised by the pastor to love her husband more, to overlook his

problems and accept him, since that was the way he was.

Sally's bad experience with church leaders early in her marriage made her reluctant to seek further help from her church. She reported that her pastor had noticed that things were not going well in her marriage, and subsequently, the pastor's wife began to provide subtle tips for Sally on how to be a better wife to her husband. These tips included being more willing in the bedroom and doing more things to please her husband, including baking him cookies.

These women's experiences reveal that they were receiving subtle, and not so subtle, messages from church leaders that they were responsible for remedying any marital problems they had. Ultimately, they were being blamed for their husbands' abusiveness or encouraged to change their own attitudes and actions. The participants' experiences in this study are consistent with research which found that "almost without exception women report[ed] that their pastors focused on getting them -- not their abusive husbands -- to change" (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989:23).

What appears to have been created was a cycle of minimizing, followed by frustration, which reinforced the women's silence and shame. The women minimized their husbands' abuse, and thus received inadequate, if not harmful, advice from pastors. After obtaining this advice, they became frustrated and disappointed in their church leaders, which in turn reinforced their fear of telling pastors about the abuse. In addition, guilt and pride played a role in their reluctance to provide too many details of the abuse. Arlene reported why she did not say much to her pastor: "You feel too ashamed, you really do, because you feel like you have failed so much." As a result, the secrecy and shame

surrounding this problem failed to be broken for these women. This secrecy has continued to persist for several of the participants.

Not all of the advice pastors gave was ineffective or harmful to the women. Nancy's pastor was supportive of her separation, although this support was qualified. He stated: "I'm against separating but in your case you have done right." Another woman received support, in the form of information, from a Mennonite pastor who was not from her own church. This pastor informed Sarah that she could go to a transition house if the abuse became too threatening. Although Sarah did not use this service, she was thankful that someone had shown concern for her safety. Linda initially was not impressed with the help she received from her church, but as the pastors learned more about her situation and became aware of how manipulative her husband was, they were more understanding and supportive of her decision to leave him, and eventually subtly encouraged it. Although a majority of the women stated that they received good counselling from their church pastors after their marriages ended, it should be noted that this counselling was not from the same churches that the women went to while they were married.

Hindrances to the Women's Experiences: Church Teachings

As I have already argued, the women minimized their husband's abuse, in part, because they were ashamed and because they felt it was their Christian duty to protect their husbands. Furthermore, the women endured their husbands' abuse for as long as they did because of their socialization into a patriarchal culture, and more significantly, because of their Mennonite upbringings.

Feminists have strongly argued that, historically, Christian churches have been patriarchal institutions which have not only taught that women are second class citizens, but have created an environment which condones, or at least fails to speak out against, violence against women. Although churches have had a long patriarchal tradition, is this theology still being preached in Mennonite churches? More importantly, what messages did these women hear? How strong a role did the women's Mennonite upbringing and church teachings play in their decisions to remain with, and then to leave their husbands?

When I asked the women to list various theological teachings which they felt influenced how they dealt with their abusive relationships, the teachings and practices of forgiveness, reconciliation and submission were mentioned. While the participants felt that these were important and good teachings, the church's emphasis on them and the women's internalization of these teachings combined to make the women's journey from abuse victim to survivor a difficult one.

The Christian ideals of forgiveness and reconciliation left the women with guilt and uncertainty. Theological teaching within the Mennonite church, although not exclusive to Mennonites, suggests that when one party has wronged another, forgiveness should be the goal, followed by reconciliation between the feuding parties. Linda left her husband several times, fleeing to transition houses for the safety of her children and herself. Each time, however, she returned home, often as a result of encouragement/pressure from the pastor in her church. Linda recalled that she was frustrated with church leaders and persons in the church who were quick to ask her if her husband had expressed remorse. She felt that behind this question was an implicit expectation for her to "forgive and

forget," and to reconcile with her husband. What was more, she felt as though she was at fault if she did not forgive her husband.

The women had been taught that, as Christians, "if we don't forgive, God can't forgive us." Consequently, the women felt they needed to forgive their husbands for what the men had done to them. The women were quick to forgive their husbands, but after many years of seeing no actual change in their husbands' behaviour, the women became sceptical. Furthermore, the women came to recognize that their husbands' apologies and requests for forgiveness were not sincere, but merely a way for them to get what they wanted. As Sally related: "He never apologized unless he wanted the bedroom, until I caught on to that.... Then he never, ever apologized at all."

Several of the women came to a point in their marriages when they acknowledged that reconciliation with their abusers was no longer an option if they were the only ones willing to work at their relationships. As Sally stated, "I [am] giving and giving and giving and giving and I don't feel like I am getting anything back, and I don't have anything left to give." At that point, Sally began to focus upon herself and her needs. Linda admitted that she struggled with "guilt pangs" when she finally stated that healing was her goal, not reconciliation. She believed that her guilt arose from years of being taught that reconciliation, love and forgiveness were important Christian values. Jennifer had a similar experience; she felt guilty when her Christian friends placed the blame on her, when she admitted that she was no longer seeking, or expecting, reconciliation with her husband.

Mennonites have been very preoccupied with the ministry of reconciliation and, as

a result, the churches have attempted to restore violated relationships too quickly (Block, 1991). This need to alleviate or minimize conflict and confrontation was a hindrance to the women because they were told that they were to blame if they were not actively preserving their marriages. As a result, they experienced guilt feelings. The women struggled to preserve their relationships, but when it became an impossible ideal for them to live up to, several women ended their marriages. The research participants struggled over how many times they should forgive their husbands. Arlene expressed this conflict:

> I knew I had to forgive and I know it is the only way you can live at peace with yourself, if you forgive others. Jesus says you don't get forgiveness either, if you don't forgive. So it is a real big battle you know.

In addition, the women battled guilt over ending their relationships. Several women mentioned that "the last person to forgive you is yourself." A number of women seemed to have had an easier time forgiving their husbands for their abusiveness toward them than forgiving themselves for their failed marriages. This suggests that the women were very much influenced by the church teachings and morals, particularly those regarding divorce and forgiveness.

The Mennonite church's concern with forgiveness and reconciliation further hindered women because several husbands used these teachings to their advantage. After verbally or physically assaulting their wives, a number of husbands expected their wives to forgive them, reminding their wives that the Bible said that they were to repeatedly forgive. In addition, several men manipulated the church leaders for some time, in order to obtain the support of the church. The men were able to do so because they were

"smooth talkers," skilled at presenting a manufactured image of themselves. Martha stated that her husband "went with the biggest Bible to church." They were men who possessed great powers of persuasion and who had proficient verbal skills: "He could talk around so well. People would never think that there was anything wrong with him." The husbands were able to manipulate church leaders because "the pastors are geared for if someone is crying and saying how sorry they are, and being so repentive [sic], this is what they are trained to respond to."

After Linda fled from her home because of the violence, her husband went to the church in tears, stating that he was sorry and he wanted his family back. The pastors immediately attempted to reconcile the two, without asking Linda to explain why she left. Near the end of the relationship, when Linda threatened to leave her husband, he attempted to get her excommunicated from the church, arguing that she was not honouring her marriage vow. Linda's husband intimidated her by telling her that church leaders were coming to the house to speak with her. Linda was raised to respect the authority of the church, and these threats kept her fearful of her husband, and of her church leaders.

Nancy's former husband also went to the church when she left him, asking for help and "send[ing] every preacher after me. Every preacher that he could find." These pastors encouraged Nancy to reconcile with her husband. As soon as Nancy returned home, her husband no longer desired any help from their church. Jennifer's husband attempted to manipulate her through guilt, by telling her in front of the church assembly, at his baptism, that he loved her and desired to try to put the marriage back together. By

publicly announcing his intentions, he placed the blame and guilt on her if she did not respond accordingly. However, by this time in their relationship, Jennifer recognized that this public admission was only another attempt to manipulate her, and that it lacked any sincerity.

The Christian teaching of submission posed difficulties for a majority of the women in this study. All of the women stated that they submitted to their husbands' authority; a few admitted that, in retrospect, perhaps they were too submissive. The women submitted to their husbands' headship because they had been taught, and they believed, that this was their responsibility as Christian wives. The women did not, however, submit to their husbands if it involved them engaging in something that went against biblical principles or their moral standards. Jennifer revealed that she clung to the New Testament (NT) passage, I Peter 3:1-2, which stated that if she was a submissive wife, her husband would be won over and become a Christian through her pure and reverent life. Jennifer wanted her husband to become a Christian, and that hope encouraged her to persist in her obedient ways. After the marriage was over, Jennifer recognized that her focus on this one passage hindered her ability to understand and cope with her husband's abuse.

A majority of the women stated that they did not disagree with the biblical principle of submission; they did, however, criticize the church for placing too much emphasis upon the women's role in marriage. Arlene felt that pastors were overly concerned with the principle of submission, which obstructed their ability to give useful advice. The women felt as though they were being blamed for their husbands' abusiveness, because pastors and church members assumed that they were not being

submissive wives. The women reported that they would not have difficulty being submissive wives as long as their husbands treated them with love and respect, as outlined in the NT passage of Ephesians 5: 25-29. Conversely, a number of women had been questioning their duty to submit since their separation and/or divorce, believing that the scripture verses which dealt with submission had been abused and distorted, not only by their husbands, but by their churches.

Block (1991) has suggested that the theology of submission has been corrupted into a theology of dominance. This corruption in theology has provided abusive men with the opportunity to make demands upon their wives, using scripture for justification. One husband understood his position in the family as such: "You are my wife, I can do what I want. You must be submissive to me." Another husband quoted the NT passage, I Corinthians 13, as a suggestion for how his wife should react to his abuse: "Love takes everything, love endures everything." The women did love their husbands and endured much abuse, because they were committed to living according to scripture and church teachings which outlined their role as Christian women. These teachings, however, were used to justify the men's abusive behaviour, and made the women more passive to the abuse.

Pacifism

The women's commitment to Mennonite peace theology influenced how they reacted to the abuse and how they responded to their husbands. Practising non-violence and preaching pacifism have been important aspects of Mennonite heritage. All of the

women in this study recalled hearing sermons in Mennonite churches about being peaceful, loving people, as they were growing up. When asked if they remembered listening to sermons or Sunday school lessons regarding violence in the home, a few recalled that peaceful relations within the family were briefly mentioned, but none recollected any specific or significant mention of violence against women/wives. Several women reported that the pastors at the churches they were attending at the time of the interviews, had addressed this issue occasionally.

When asked how they understood Mennonite pacifism in the context of their abusive relationships, the women unanimously responded that they had tried to be the peacemakers in their marriages. Katherine internalized the Mennonite peace position to mean that she should "keep peace at all cost;" Jennifer stated that she was always the one to "smooth things over." Similarly, Linda recalled: "I actually took pride in being the peacemaker between my siblings, always the pleaser." As a result of the pattern she learned as a child, she instinctively displayed the same behaviour as an adult dealing with an abusive husband:

> I went through a real thing where I was proud of myself for putting up with anything to keep the peace. God will be happy with me, I am keeping the peace. That's what he wants; blessed are the peacemakers.

The Mennonite peace theology, although an important ethic, exacerbated the women's already overburdened sense of responsibility for maintaining the stability within their marriages. Believing they were the ones who were required to make and keep the peace, the women were vulnerable because they did not think that they could or should

resist their husbands' abusive treatment. In effect, this peace theology encouraged the women to become passive, because they believed they had to "turn the other cheek." Linda, who once used physical force with her husband, stated that she felt tremendous guilt because she was not being a pacifist. Although the women in this study internalized and lived out their commitment to nonviolent love, it placed them in a disadvantaged position because they were living with men who failed to abide by this ethic.

Church Experiences

The churches the women attended, with their accompanying theological teachings, were neither places of comfort for the women while they endeavoured to remain with their husbands, nor at the time their marriages came to an end. Linda's words reflected what many of the women experienced in their churches:

> I would basically say that they [the church] hindered a lot more, although now they are being more positive and helpful, but prior it was more of a hindrance. Although I knew that they loved me and would always be there for me and cared for my safety and things like that ... they didn't understand.

During and after their marriages, there were many occasions when the women were angry at their churches' lack of response, or what they felt were inappropriate responses, to their problems. Arlene expressed her frustration, "I really had to work through not becoming bitter.... You really get frustrated with these people not being able to be any help, not see[ing] what is really wrong." Arlene stated that she felt very alone during her times of marital difficulties; she did not receive any visits or phone calls from

people within the church. In response to that frustration, she stopped attending church for several Sundays, but because Arlene wanted her children to attend church, she returned. Sarah expressed similar feelings:

> I have to be careful not to build up a grudge because they knew we had problems but really didn't offer help. They all want to know and talk about it, but not pray about it and do something about it.

A number of women mentioned that their personal guilt and shame over the terminations of their relationships were compounded by the manner in which people in their churches treated them. Linda revealed that although her church was generally supportive of her she felt that

> many don't understand at all, and you can tell in their eyes. You can tell when they don't talk to you any more, or it's very surface talk. Even if they do know a little bit, you can see judgement in their eyes, you can see it.

The women struggled with their abuse experiences at a personal and private level. Their community of faith, in particular the church, provided little help as the women endeavoured to end the abuse while maintaining their marriages. When their relationships ended, the women were faced with church teachings and personal beliefs that added to their guilt and shame. Church teachings, the words and actions of pastors and church members, all of which could have helped these women, acted to further isolate and silence them.

Several women were told that God hated divorce and that they were sinning to pursue that path. Other women verbalized that they felt ostracized by their churches. This feeling of not being accepted reinforced their internal feelings that they did not

belong. The women felt they differed from other church members, and thus felt that they were outcasts. Other women spoke of the pain and aloneness of being single within a marriage and family oriented church. Martha revealed that she was shunned by Mennonites and not accepted in Mennonite churches because she was divorced. This caused her immeasurable grief. She went to numerous Mennonite churches hoping to find a place that accepted her. It was ultimately a non-Mennonite church that made her feel welcome. Sarah stated that although thinking was changing within Mennonite churches, she felt that acceptance of separation and/or divorce was still not widespread.

Largely because of the women's negative experiences with their churches, eight out of the nine women stopped attending the churches they had been affiliated with, or members of, soon after their relationships ended. As Karen recalled, "I was the only woman that no husband came with, they all just looked at me, didn't say hi and didn't accept me, so I got out of there." The churches the women were attending, at the time of the interviews, were larger, had more liberal theological teachings, and a more heterogenous group of believers, than their previous churches. The one woman who continued attending the same church after her marriage ended felt fairly accepted by this quite large and liberal church. All nine women were happy in their present churches and were generally encouraged by the support they were receiving there.

The women were generally disappointed in their prior churches for not helping them cope with the guilt and blame; however, the women's overall analysis of the church was optimistic. They believed that Mennonite churches were changing, that they were beginning to deal with issues of abuse, and that the silence surrounding this and other

issues was slowly being broken. As one woman optimistically claimed, "the churches are trying, they have changed somewhat."

Journeys Toward Healing

Although the women were disillusioned by their churches, this disappointment did not result in them abandoning their Christian community altogether, nor did it present a major crisis for their personal faith. Martha made this distinction: "I hated religion, I hated people, but I never hated God." The anger and frustration directed at various Mennonite churches did not affect the participants' feelings toward God. Nancy related:

> No, I never have been angry at God. Now that I look back, sometimes I say that I could have been angry because [of] what I had to go through. Why did He allow that to happen, because He could have changed that. [But], no I never got angry.

For Katherine, anger toward God "was never an option, He was so loving."

The women's lack of anger at God was, in part, because they believed that there was a greater purpose, or reason for having to endure the abuse. Sarah stated that she took comfort in Psalm 139, which reassured her that her life course had been prepared for her by her Lord, and that she would be able to get through any problems with God's help. Similarly, Karen was able to stand firm in her faith, convinced that God had a plan for her life and would not give her more than she could endure. Karen asserted that she was able to see the positive aspects of her abuse experience:

> I have learned an incredible amount, I would never trade my experience with my ex-husband.... The person that I am today is because of what I went through in our marriage.

Linda revealed her thoughts: "Even though I was going through everything I knew that I was going through things for a reason. At one time I would like to be able to help other women in some way." Several of the women have used their experience to help other women in need. One woman started a support group in her church for women in crisis, while others have provided assistance to women through less formal channels.

An outcome of the women's abuse experiences, according to the women, was that their personal faith in God had been strengthened. Although most of Martha's friends and family members failed to be a support to her, she knew that she was constantly under God's protection: "I still believe `til this day, if the Lord wouldn't have been for me, I wouldn't be alive, I would be dead." Martha felt that her isolation at the time of her divorce forced her to turn to God, from Whom she drew her strength. She explained her faith: "What do you have if you have nobody? You just go close to God, that is the only thing you can do; that pulls you through." Arlene expressed similar convictions, "if you trust God He sees you through. Sometimes I thought maybe God let me be always disappointed with people so I would trust in Him alone."

Not only did Karen's faith help her to cope with her husband's abuse, it instilled in her a trust in God that she did not have previously. Katherine also learned to place her trust in God, particularly when her relationship ended. "It's almost a privilege to have needed the Lord so much that He could show Himself." Sally's faith and knowledge of God underwent a transformation:

> I think I never knew who God was before ... God is a very merciful God and He is a very loving God, and a very forgiving God. A different image than what I had before.

Similarly, Nancy revealed that during her separation and divorce she experienced God more personally; for her, God was full of grace and forgiveness. Jennifer obtained something from her faith that she failed to receive elsewhere, "I could receive God's forgiveness and His love, and [know that] I was still valuable."

The women endured their husbands' abuse in solitude. However, their paths toward recovery have not been as lonely. Several of the research participants had supportive friends and family members who helped them, while others benefitted from counselling by therapists and church pastors. A majority of the women stated that personal reading and studying of the Bible, as well as prayer, were a source of great comfort to them, both during their marriages and particularly after their relationships ended. Additionally, self-help books were useful for some women.

In an effort to better understand themselves and their situations, several of the women began to re-examine the Bible, looking for scripture verses on submission, forgiveness and divorce. The women were actively engaging in working toward healing by finding other interpretations of certain scripture passages, and by taking solace in verses on which they had rarely, or never, heard sermons. The women have also worked toward healing by building up a network of supportive friends, especially in their new churches.

Ultimately, however, these women relied upon their own determination, and the strength they received from God as they struggled toward wholeness and peace. Their faith in God was a major motivating force which helped them not only to cope with the abuse, but also to strive toward being at peace with themselves when their relationships

ended.

Although none of the women were happy that their marriages failed, they agreed that ultimately it was for the best. The participants expressed thankfulness that they no longer lived in constant fear. They felt safe within their own homes; there was no need to "walk on egg shells" any more. Martha contended that the pain of divorce, with its accompanying shame, was easier to cope with than the pain of continued verbal and physical assaults.

Not all of the women verbalized this, yet it seemed evident that each woman's sense of self-worth increased after her relationship ended. In fact, for several women, leaving their husbands was an act of self-assertion. The increased self-esteem appeared to be related, at least in part, to the women's personal faith in God and their studying of the Bible. The women were optimistic about the road ahead of them because they recognized that God was concerned about them and considered them to be valuable persons. Karen's words revealed her new confidence: "I am going to voice my opinions, my opinions are important, I am important!" Since Martha's divorce, she too has found her once silenced "voice." She now questions and challenges ideas and theological arguments in her search for truth and wholeness. Although a few women were still struggling with residual feelings of guilt and shame over their ended marriages, Nancy's words sum up what life without an abusive partner was like: "Life is fun. I never knew that life could be really fun; I really enjoy my life."

The Participants' Suggestions for Change

In the hopes of having their experiences benefit other women, the participants in this study offered suggestions on how Mennonite churches could become more aware of, and helpful to, other abuse victims. The recommendation most often made by the women was for increased education, both for pastors and for parishioners. Additionally, the women stated that pastors need to recognize that abused women who speak with them minimized their problems, and thus pastors need to probe for more details. The women encouraged pastors not to place blame on women victims, but to attentively listen to them and believe their stories. One woman strongly felt that pastors should not be providing advice to abused wives unless they are trained in this area.

Education for members of the congregation was also an important concern voiced by the women. This education could address the early warning signs of abuse and outline the various types of abuse. As one woman stated, "Until we get that kind of an education we don't even know ourselves that we are being abused." The women suggested that seminars and Bible study groups should begin to address the problem of violence in the home, and wife abuse in particular. Several women also recommended that the "gender issue" be discussed more in churches. Furthermore, it was proposed that men in the church needed more education regarding their responsibilities as husbands, while less emphasis should be placed on women's responsibilities. The women also stated that if persons in a church knew that there was an abused woman among them, they should offer support, in the form of prayer, visitation, meal preparation, babysitting and friendship. The women stated that criticism and blame from others were redundant because they were

already blaming themselves for their problems. Rather, they would have appreciated it if church members listened to them, showed concern for their welfare, and did not treat them as inferior or sinful persons after they became separated/divorced.

Another recommendation by the participants in this study was for churches to have women in visible leadership capacities. Although not all of the women had a bad experience with a male counsellor or pastor, most women agreed that they found it easier to speak with another woman. Arlene reported that she felt male pastors did not take her seriously, perhaps because they could not see her point of view. Jennifer argued in favour of women pastors: "I think it is definitely helpful to have them on staff, absolutely. I think it is almost vital to issues that are happening today." As another woman remarked, "there are women going through this all the time." Therefore, having women in leadership and/or counselling positions in churches would appear to make a difference to women who wished to speak with a church leader. Several of the participants' new churches had women in pastoral/counselling positions. In addition, several of the women received helpful counsel from women therapists. They reported that these women asked deeper questions, were more empathetic, and gained their trust more quickly.

Mennonite churches, however, have been slow to place women in positions of power within the church. A literal interpretation of scriptures argues that women should not hold positions of authority over men in the church. Although this is still adhered to in many churches, there has been a change in attitudes over recent years. Kauffman and Driedger (1991) reported that 52% of their study's North American Mennonite respondents favoured expanded leadership roles for women at local, district and

denominational levels. Fifty-nine percent of the General Conference (GC) Mennonites were in favour of female ordination, while only 27% of Mennonite Brethren (MB) Mennonites stated that they favoured female ordination. Within the GC denomination, females are being ordained, while the MB denomination does not ordain women.

The women in this study were at different stages in their healing processes, yet I was impressed by the deep inner strength and enthusiasm each woman possessed. Moreover, their optimism about the future, and their joy in the present, were deeply moving and inspiring. The women's abuse experiences, with their accompanying disappointments with their churches, had not made them cynical or bitter, but had transformed them into women of strength and inner peace. These women were not merely survivors of abuse but courageous victors.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Before presenting a summary and discussion of the research findings, various points must be addressed concerning the nature of this research. Since little research existed on Mennonites and abuse, I chose to undertake an exploratory and qualitative study. As such, the sample size was small and not randomly selected. Due to the sensitive and secretive nature of the research topic, I was unable to randomly select respondents from a large pool of potential research participants. Rather, all of the women who expressed interest in speaking with me became part of the sample. Furthermore, women heard about and agreed to be involved in this research project through contact persons. The sample of women was drawn from one geographical locale, which may have introduced possible bias. My original intent was to interview only women married to Mennonite men. However, due to time and financial constraints and to the availability of these women, this criterion was dropped. As a result, my ability to comment on Mennonite male violence has been limited.

The women in this study were fairly traditional in their Mennonite upbringing and beliefs: four women immigrated to Canada, and the rest were first or second generation Canadians. It is likely that Mennonite women who have resided in Canada longer or who live in other geographical locations, may be less traditional in their socialization and their belief systems, and thus their experiences of abuse may differ in nature and extent.

All of the women attended rather conservative churches. Although Mennonite theology has traditionally been conservative, there are numerous liberal Mennonite

churches. Perhaps if the study had been composed of participants who had attended more liberal Mennonite churches, and who adhered to more liberal belief systems, their experiences of abuse may have varied significantly from the nine women in this study.

While this research has various shortcomings, these limitations do not prevent me from asserting that this project has contributed to sociological literature, particularly because there has been little research on the relationship between religion and abuse, and more specifically on Mennonites and wife abuse. The small, non-random sample does pose limitations on my ability to make broad generalizations about these research findings. However, I feel that this loss was compensated for by the detailed information gained from the in-depth interviews. As Seidman suggests:

> Because hypotheses are not being tested, the issue is not whether the researcher can generalize the findings of an interview study to a broader population. Instead the researcher's task is to present the experience of the participants in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects (1991:41).

Summary and Analysis

The types of abuse the women in this study experienced were similar in many respects to those of other abused women. Encouraging the women to name and define their husbands' abuse revealed that it encompassed various behaviours, ranging from subtle to blatant actions. All of the women experienced psychological manipulation and control, which wore away their self-esteem and increased their passivity. Eight out of the

nine women experienced physical abuse while six women were sexually abused by their husbands. Contrary to what had been speculated by other researchers on Mennonites (Block, 1991), the incidence of physical and sexual abuse in this study was significantly high.

At both the theoretical and empirical levels, there has been extensive research exploring why men abuse their wives. Adherence to ideological patriarchy, commonly expressed as a belief in male superiority and control, has provided arguments for why some men are more likely to abuse their wives than others. From the findings of this study, I am unable to make strong assertions regarding that relationship because the research focus was on the experiences of abused women. However, according to the women, all of their husbands strongly believed in the supremacy of male control and upheld rigid sex roles, which is consistent with the patriarchy thesis. What was more fundamental to this research was that the **women** also adhered to a strong patriarchal ideology, an ideology rooted in the women's conservative upbringings and reinforced by religious teachings within their Mennonite churches.

The women in this study were more conservative in their views regarding marriage and relationship roles than women without strict religious upbringings. However, the women did not all adhere to the same traditional beliefs, and the variation among them appeared to be related to the women's age, education and the strictness of their upbringing. The four oldest women had the least amount of formal education, which was probably a result of growing up in conservative, South American Mennonite colonies/communities. These combined factors were likely the reason for their more

conservative beliefs concerning male and female roles, and their interpretations of the scriptures. It is understandable that the older generation of women would be somewhat more traditional than those who were first or second generation Canadian Mennonites. The more traditional women were married to their husbands somewhat longer than the women who had received more education and who had less traditional upbringings and less conservative beliefs. This finding is consistent with research which states that the more traditional women are, the more likely they are to remain with their abusers (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989; Pagelow, 1984).

Additionally, the most conservative women were married to Mennonite men, while the others were married to non-Mennonites. The Mennonite men had also been raised in conservative communities and adhered to traditional thinking. Interestingly, three out of the four women married to Mennonite men experienced the greatest amounts of physical abuse from their husbands. However, two women not married to Mennonite men also experienced severe physical and sexual abuse. These women's husbands also appeared to uphold a strongly patriarchal ideology. Although not all of the men were Mennonites, all of them were abusive. Therefore, the strongest correlation between the men and violence, in this study, was adherence to traditional teachings and a belief in patriarchy. These beliefs influenced their actions and resulted in them using their power and control to dominate and abuse their wives.

Researchers who theorize on wife abuse have spent much energy attempting to determine why women remain with their abusers. The women in this study provided various reasons for doing so, many similar to those suggested within the wife abuse

literature (Sinclair, 1985; Martin, 1981; Walker, 1979). However, the women's reasons appeared to be strongly linked to their religiosity and influenced by Mennonite norms and values. The importance of marital commitment and its permanence were consistently cited as reasons for remaining with their husbands. This personal commitment, strengthened by teachings within Mennonite churches, encouraged the women to hope and pray that their husbands would change. The women felt they had to remain committed to their marriage vows, even when it became very clear that their husbands would not change. This commitment was reinforced by the women's internalization of blame; they felt as if they were responsible for the problems, and thus they should also be responsible for mending them.

As I read over the transcriptions of the interviews, I made notes on the women's experiences, and I was struck by the amount of times I wrote down the words **self-blame**, **shame** and **silence**. The participants blamed themselves for being abused when they could not get their husbands to change. As a result, the women experienced guilt when their relationships ended. The women's self-esteem had been trampled on, which led them to accept the blame for their problems. The women experienced shame because they felt as though they had failed, both as Christians and as wives. They clung to their marriages for as long as they did because they did not want to be shamed by a separation and/or divorce. Moreover, the women's shame was reinforced because they felt as though they were the only ones experiencing these problems.

The combination of the women's guilt and shame helped to maintain their silence. Within larger society, there was much shame and secrecy for women who were abused in

the 1970's and early 1980's. This has changed somewhat over the past decade as there has been increased public awareness and concern about this problem. For women within conservative churches this shame continues because churches have been slow to admit that wife abuse is a reality within their congregations and hence, are slow to address this issue. For Mennonite women, whose churches emphasize peaceful relations and Christian love, the shame and secrecy surrounding this problem exists to a greater degree.

The silence continues because Mennonite women have been slow to admit that they are being abused by their husbands. As one of the participants stated, she learned at a young age that if women were being mistreated by their husbands, they merely suffered in silence. As previously stated, some of the women who were approached by the contact person about being interviewed were fearful of breaking their silence, and thus declined becoming involved. As well, several of the women who agreed to be interviewed had numerous concerns about secrecy and confidentiality. What I believe was at work here was the tradition of silence; Mennonites have been taught to keep their problems hidden, especially problems of a marital or sexual nature. Within Mennonite circles, as in the larger society, problems considered to be "private" are rarely openly discussed. The need for the women to make it appear that their marriages were fine was a motivating factor in their silence.

Closely related to the women's shame and secrecy was their denial of the abuse. All of the participants stated that they denied to themselves and to others that they were living in abusive marriages. For the women, denial was a coping mechanism. Several of the women were conscious that they were living in denial, while others did not recognize

that they were in fact doing so. The women recognized that it was easier for them to deny their abusive realities than to face them and admit that they had problems. By admitting the problems, action was required. This might require separation from their husbands, a decision that the women did not believe to be an option. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that guilt and self-blame, coupled with shame, would result in denial and secrecy.

In addition to guilt and denial, the findings of this study suggest that the women's experiences of abuse were very strongly affected by general cultural and religious socialization, as well as by specific Mennonite theological teachings and values. These teachings influenced the women's beliefs, which in turn affected their actions. Although the participants in this study did not explicitly discuss the Christian teaching of self-abnegation, or selflessness, this behaviour was evident in their lives. When the women spoke about the effects of their abuse experiences, they typically focused upon others. They expressed concern for the safety of their children, for their husbands' spiritual and emotional well-being, and concern for what others thought about them. The women's main desire, as they recognized and verbalized it, was for a successful, peaceful marriage. This need was a powerful force which reinforced their commitment to their husbands. Furthermore, the women felt responsible for maintaining their family units, this was their duty. Aside from their personal safety needs, the women failed to acknowledge or expect that they had other needs, let alone recognize that these needs were unfulfilled.

Thinking of others before themselves and believing that they needed to be obedient to their husbands, put the women in extremely defenceless positions. It took them a long

time before they could recognize and admit that they were being unjustly treated. As Christian women, they were taught to be meek, and that claiming rights for themselves was a sin of pride (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1989). Moreover, the women had been taught that family needs took precedence over individual needs or desires. The women learned to be selfless within the church community, and this was reinforced by a culture in which women have routinely been subservient to men, and expected to be nurturers and care-givers. The women were so consumed with determining and meeting the needs of others, especially those of their husbands, that they had very little time to devote to themselves. As a result, the women remained with their husbands, hoping that the men would change, and attempting to do all they could to change themselves in order to please their husbands.

Generally, the Christian teaching with which the women had the most trouble was their churches' emphasis on female submission. Teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation also presented the participants with difficulties. The women stated that they did not disagree with these teachings, but that they were opposed to pastors focusing predominantly on the women's role in reconciliation and submission. They felt that this emphasis placed too much blame on the women; they were already overwhelmed with their own guilt and self-blame. Hearing sermons regarding practising submission, obedience and love only served to reinforce their shame and perpetuate their silence.

According to Penner (1992), although theology has taught that suffering is Christ-like and honourable, the Mennonite theological tradition has not explicitly addressed the context of women's suffering. As a result, the teaching of suffering has reinforced women's silence concerning abuse. The participants in this study did not spend much time

discussing suffering, but merely recognized that it was part of being a Christian. For these women, suffering meant silently enduring years of abuse from their husbands. At the time of the interviews, the women were more concerned to reflect on the positive aspects of their suffering than to dwell on the negative ones.

A church teaching quite specific to Mennonites is pacifism. The participants in this study stated that the Mennonite emphasis on pacifism influenced how they reacted to their abusive experiences. These women had internalized this teaching and thus felt responsible for maintaining the peace within their homes. Although pacifism was important to these women, it is difficult to determine how much of this concern for peace was related to Mennonite teachings and how much was a result of traditional sex role socialization, which teaches women they are the ones responsible for the smooth running of their families. I would suggest that much of the women's concern for maintaining the peace in their families arose from their more general societal socialization. This was, however, reinforced by the Mennonite peace theology as well as other Christian teachings. Teachings closely related to pacifism are forgiveness and reconciliation. The women forgave their husbands after they abused them, believing that they should "turn the other cheek" and not repay violence with violence. By attempting to be peacemakers, the women passively accepted their abuse, which increased their vulnerability to repeated mistreatment by their husbands.

As spiritual women, one of the methods they used for coping with the abuse was to seek advice from Christian counsellors/pastors. Consistent with the wife abuse literature, the women minimized their problems when they spoke with pastors and/or

counsellors. They reported that they had marital problems, yet they could not bring themselves to reveal that their problems included extreme psychological manipulation, as well as physical and sexual abuse. The women's fear of discussing the abuse does not seem surprising considering the above discussion of guilt and shame.

If, and when, the women confided in pastors, the advice they received (to forgive, love, submit to, and accept, their husbands) was often not helpful to them, and I would argue that it was detrimental to their mental, spiritual and physical well-being. The overriding concern of Mennonite pastors, as in other conservative Protestant denominations, has traditionally been to preserve marriages and family stability. The women found that the advice they received focused on ways that they could change, rather than on getting their husbands to change. This counselling placed more guilt and blame on the women.

According to Block (1991), the Mennonite church must deal with the contradiction within its theology which emphasizes love and peaceful relations, while at the same time advocates patriarchal, hierarchal relations between the genders. The Mennonite church emphasizes the sanctity of life and equality of believers, yet it has tended to place a high value on female submission in relationships. Male headship is preached as God-ordained, a teaching which has been misinterpreted to justify male domination, even to the extent of abuse (Block, 1991).

It is important to note that not only did Mennonite pastors provide conservative advice, but counsellors and therapists (whether Christians or non-Christians), also made the women feel as though they were the ones responsible for the abuse. In addition,

several of the women received typical "blame the victim" advice from friends and family members.

This research revealed that the Mennonite church, as an institution, was not particularly helpful to the women as they attempted to cope with their abuse experiences. However, their personal faith in God was extremely significant in helping the women to deal with the abuse, both during their relationships and after their separations. There appears to be a tension between the church as a patriarchal institution, and faith as a personal resource. The women were critical of their churches and some of the advice and teachings they had received there, yet they were very committed to their personal faith in God. Generally, the women were also committed to the Mennonite church, in spite of their negative experiences.

The private realm, the women's faith in God, helped the women to endure the abuse and provided them with comfort when they were no longer with their husbands. As Christian women, their faith was their most important resource, one which gave them the strength and courage to face the next day. The public arena, the church, also played a significant role in the lives of the women. This role, however, was not always a positive one. The Mennonite teachings on male headship and female submission encouraged the women to be passive and silent. The women had been taught and believed that they were to love, honour and obey their husbands, "'til death us do part." When the women's relationships ended, the Mennonite views on marital permanence and divorce perpetuated their guilt and shame.

Women as Active Agents

The women had been socialized to submit, obey, suffer in silence, and view divorce as a sin. However, they were eventually able to distance themselves from that socialization in order to take control over their own lives and the lives of their children. Four women did so by recognizing that their safety and sanity were at risk if they continued to stay with their abusers, and thus they left. The other women, although concerned for their own well-being, remained with their husbands largely because they felt that separation/divorce were not options for them as Christians. The women wanted desperately to change their situations, particularly the behaviour of their husbands, but they did not know how to do so because their husbands refused to change. As a result, the women felt trapped, and thus they attempted to gain some control by changing themselves in the hope of producing the desired effect. All of the women, however, took increased control over their own lives once their relationships ended. The research participants had to start new lives, several with little financial and/or emotional support from family members and friends. This was a significant change for the women because they had lived most, if not all, of their marriages under the control of their husbands.

While they were committed Christians, the women were also actively working toward change, engaged in acts of courage and resistance. When their relationships ended, whether by their choice or by their husbands' leaving, the participants had to grapple with the issue of separation and/or divorce, because they themselves felt that these actions were not right or biblical. However, as one of the participants recognized, by leaving her husband **she** was not breaking the marriage covenant, for it had already been

broken by her husband's use of violence. Another way that the women worked toward change was to more closely examine scriptures for themselves. They sought out new interpretations, especially in relation to women's roles and issues such as submission, forgiveness and divorce. The women were no longer willing to blindly accept the traditional teachings that had been handed down to them. They determined to find out what the entire Bible stated on an issue, rather than just one or two frequently cited verses. The women also spent time on themselves and began to address their own needs. Most of the women chose to obtain counselling for themselves to work on self-esteem and abuse issues. Additionally, the women sought out new churches, where they could build up support networks.

Eight of the nine research participants changed churches after their relationships ended. Although they could have left out of anger or bitterness toward their churches and congregations, they did not. They changed churches because they desired to find a place where others did not know them and where they would be accepted. The churches they chose to attend were larger and more accepting of them. Several of the participants received helpful counselling from their new, less conservative, pastors.

Changes needed within Mennonite Churches

Christian churches are centres for education and new awareness for many people within our society. Religious beliefs and the institutional church provide people with a sense of belonging and impart important guidelines and values. Churches are influential in shaping people's understanding of themselves and their relationships (Fortune, 1982).

Therefore, church leaders must act responsibly and not only acknowledge the issue of abuse, but address it and work toward preventing family violence and wife abuse. Christian churches need to challenge the idea that family violence is a private matter (Strom, 1986). For this to occur, churches must examine, understand and address the patriarchal roots of the problem (Task Force Report of Anglican Church, 1987).

Churches have failed theologically; they have "failed to examine how their bias toward patriarchal systems has clouded their vision of a true peace" (Morris, 1988:11). It is essential that Christian churches wrestle with patriarchal texts and admit that their religious teachings have helped promote women's victimization through the misapplication of scripture. Religious institutions, and particularly Mennonite churches, must acknowledge that abuse is

> common, normative, and frighteningly logical in a patriarchal society. The church must creatively challenge the assumption that patriarchy represents the best and only way to live in relationship. It must fight the belief that God intended for men to dominate women and children (Heggen, 1993:176).

The Mennonite church states that it is concerned with issues of peace and social justice. As such, it should persist in advocating for the powerless and vulnerable. In many instances, it is women who are powerless, especially women in abusive relationships. As Alsdurf and Alsdurf suggest, if the Christian church takes a stance on this issue,

> it should be on the side of the powerless, the victim. For too long it has focused on the women's responsibility for her husband's behavior rather than on calling the abuser to accountability and change (1989:70).

The Mennonite church has begun to address the issue of abuse over the past ten

years through educational resource material, seminars and conferences. In 1990, MCC held its first conference on family violence and conferences continue to take place in various cities across the United States and Canada.[1] In January 1994, a conference was held specifically for male leaders in the Mennonite church.[2] In Canada, a Mennonite organization entitled Voices for Non-Violence has been created, which provides resources, information and education on family violence. Although MCC, along with other Mennonite organizations, has acknowledged and initiated programs to deal with family violence, this study reveals that this concern is not being addressed by all Mennonite churches at a practical and/or theological level. Perhaps with time, more Mennonite churches will recognize that they must grapple with the issue of abuse from the pulpit and in counselling. However, for the women in this study, this awareness has not been soon enough.

The research participants provided various suggestions for how Mennonite churches could more effectively deal with the issue of wife abuse. The two suggestions most commonly voiced were for increased education for church leaders and members, and for women in visible leadership roles within the churches. These are two important avenues of change that I too recommend. Education and dialogue about family violence, and specifically wife abuse, would hopefully encourage more women to come forward with their own stories of abuse, thus reducing the shame and secrecy surrounding abuse

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[1] This was the first time the Mennonite institutional church met to speak publicly about violence and sexual assault. The first conference was entitled "Shedding Light in Darkness" and was held in California.

[2] This conference was entitled, "Men Working with Women to End Violence Against Women," and was held in Pennsylvania. This "by invitation only" event was the second for Mennonite leaders.

issues. If women were given leadership positions in the church, and particularly in counselling capacities, I believe that more women would be willing to speak up about their experiences. By ordaining women clergy, it is hoped that they would address issues and concerns which might be more relevant to the women in their congregations. Additionally, making services sensitive to abuse victims by changing the androcentric language and imagery in worship might help those parishioners who are dealing with abuse.

Contributions of this Research

This research has provided some preliminary findings on the specific experiences of abused Mennonite women. For these women, the abuse they experienced was very much influenced by their religious beliefs and their church teachings. In general, I would argue that church leaders and church teachings were more of a hindrance to the women as they struggled to understand their experiences and to change them. On the other hand, the women reported that their personal faith in God was strengthened because of their experiences and was an important resource to them when their marital relationships ended. At that time, the institutional church became a place of strength and encouragement for the women; however, all but one of them had to change churches in order to feel at peace with themselves and feel accepted by others.

I believe that this study has provided some useful insight for the sociological community, the religious community, and the Mennonite community. Perhaps more importantly, this research has been significant to the women who provided their personal

stories of pain and triumph, and to me as a researcher, a woman and a Mennonite. All of the women, when asked for their feedback at the end of the interviews, provided positive comments about the research process. Several women stated that talking to someone else had been helpful to them; it had allowed them to see areas in their lives and issues which they still needed to work on.

There was consensus among the women that it was time that wife abuse among Christians, and particularly among Mennonites, be recognized and addressed. Several women, although not confident enough to tell their stories to others personally, recognized that by speaking with me, their stories would be recorded, and they hoped that their experiences could somehow help other women. For myself, I was deeply moved and inspired by the stories the women shared with me. Hearing the women recount their trials and tribulations was deeply moving. As survivors of abuse, the women's courageous and optimistic outlook on life was very inspiring. The impact that these women and this research has had on me has been significant. If the findings of this study have been presented in such a way that others can empathize with the women and their experiences, as well as learn from them, then I feel that I have accomplished what I set out to do.

Future Research

This study has attempted to begin the process toward understanding wife abuse within the context of Mennonite theology and personal faith. There is, however, a need for further research. As this study revealed, the women's personal beliefs and their traditional religious socialization had a strong impact on their actions and reactions to their

abuse experiences. Future studies might attempt to research abused women who have left the conservative Christian churches in which they were raised, and no longer desire to be part of the institutional church, to determine if the women left because of conservative religious teachings. It might be useful to study this problem with a larger sample size, one that has more variation in geographical locale, to note if the women's experiences were consistent over a larger sample size and sampling area. In addition, it would be informative to do comparative research, with women who are still in abusive marriages and women who have left their husbands, to note the differences in their experiences and in their belief systems. It would also be of interest to conduct a longitudinal study on abused Mennonite women, to determine how their personal beliefs and faith change over time.

According to this research, pastoral advice given to Mennonite women was conservative and placed the blame on women for their problems. Future research might consider investigating pastoral attitudes on abuse, and their theological understanding of male dominance and female submission, forgiveness, love and selflessness. It would also be helpful to determine what the Mennonite peace theology means to Mennonite pastors, and if they relate this peace position to peaceful relations in the home. How do their views on pacifism affect their advice to victims of abuse or to abusers?

To more fully understand the dynamics of religion and abuse, it would be useful to conduct research with abusive Mennonite men. Future research could focus on what teachings and personal beliefs these men adhere to, and how they justify their abusive behaviours. It would be important to question how these men define their role

responsibilities in marriage. Additionally, it would be interesting to determine whether these men consider themselves to be pacifist and how they define their peace position.

There is a need for more research concerning Mennonites and abuse, particularly using qualitative methods. It would be useful to examine various other types of abuse that occur within Mennonite homes and communities, including incest, child physical abuse and elder abuse. The silence is slowly being broken surrounding the topic of abuse, which will hopefully reduce the shame and guilt suffered by abuse victims. It is my hope that this thesis has shed some light on the problem of wife abuse, and that this process will continue so that other women do not have to endure years of abuse in shame and silence.

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APPENDIX 1: NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

I am a Master's student completing a Sociology degree at the University of Victoria. I am interested in speaking with Mennonite women who have been or who are currently being abused by their husbands. This behavior could take the form of psychological/ emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. My interest is in understanding how Mennonite women experience and cope with this abuse in the context of their personal religious beliefs and church teachings. If you would consider being interviewed, I would like to talk to you. Your confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed.
RUTH, 721-7572 (Sociology Department, UVIC) or home ###-####, VICTORIA, BC.

APPENDIX 2: LETTER

Ruth Kampen
C/O University of Victoria
Sociology Department
Box 3050, Victoria, BC
V8W 2P5 721-7572

To whom it may concern:

I am a student in Sociology at the University of Victoria currently working on my Master's degree. For my thesis, I am looking for Mennonite women who have been, or who are currently, in an abusive relationship. I am interested in understanding the unique experiences that abused Mennonite women have and how abused wives deal with these experiences in relation to their personal religious beliefs and church theological teachings.

My research involves interviews in which I hope to listen and learn as well as ask questions. The interviews will last approximately two (2) hours and will be tape recorded and then transcribed by myself. I guarantee that everything that you tell me will be kept in strictest confidence and that the information I use for my thesis will be anonymous. I am the only one who will listen to the tapes and they will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Some of the questions I ask may evoke some painful personal memories or feelings. As a volunteer in this study you may decline from answering any questions which are too stressful or intrusive. As well, you may withdraw from this study at any time with no questions asked.

If you have been, or are being, abused by your husband in any of these ways: emotionally/psychologically, physically, and/or sexually abused and you consider yourself to be an ethnic or religious Mennonite then I am interested in speaking with you. You can contact me through the university or at home, at ###-####. I will gladly answer any further questions and concerns you may have.

Thank you for your time and your thoughtful consideration. Without your help this research would not be possible

Sincerely,

Ruth Kampen

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Before the interview begins I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your willingness to share your story with me; your participation in this study is greatly appreciated. I also want to remind you that you can decline to answer any question at any time. Please feel free to ask me to repeat the questions if you need to hear them again. Finally, if you would like to take a break at any time in the interview process please let me know.

To begin the interview I would like to ask you some general information questions about you and your (former) husband.

1. Where were you born/raised? Where were your parents born/raised? What about your husband?

2. What is your current marital status? How long have you been married? If divorced or separated, how long?

3. What is the highest level of education you have received?

4. Are you currently employed outside of the home? What is your occupation? (If the woman is no longer being abused) Were you employed at the time of the abuse?

5. What is you (former) husband's education level? occupation?

6. Do you have any children? How many? What are their ages?
(If couple separated) Who are they living with?

7. What is your husband's age and your age?

8. Could you give me a rough estimate of what your combined average yearly income is?

Thank you for that information. I would like to move on to asking you questions about your church involvement.

9. Are you currently attending a church? If NO, move to questions 12-14. Which one? How long have you been attending there?

10. Is this the same church you attended when your husband was abusing you? If NOT, could you tell me why you changed churches.

11. On average, how often do you attend? In addition to your attendance are you involved in other capacities in church? Explain. Is this attendance/involvement similar to when you were being abused?

12. Could you tell me when you stopped going to church and what factors played a part in that decision.

13. Although you do not attend church, do you still call yourself a Christian?

14. Do you think that you might return to the church in the future? Would you consider returning to a Mennonite church?

15. Did/does your husband attend a church? Which one? If NO, go to questions 17-18.

16. On average, how often does he attend? How often did he attend at the time when he was abusing you? In addition to his attendance, is he involved in other ways in the church?

17. Could you tell me when he stopped going to church. What reason(s) did **he** give for doing so? Why do **you** think he stopped?

18. Do you think that your husband defines himself as a Christian/ religious person even though he has left the church?

O.K., now I would like to ask you questions about the abuse you are/ did experience. Some of these questions may bring up difficult memories for you and I want to respect that. Please take as much time answering these questions as you need.

19. Could you think back in time and tell me when the abuse first started in your relationship? How long had you been together? What form did the abuse take, how often did he abuse you?

20. Did this abuse change over time? Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences of the abuse: severity, frequency and type(s) of abuse, how many years it has (had) been going on? What were the circumstances around the abuse? (If she has children) Did he ever abuse the children? Did they know about his behavior?

21. Is your husband still being abusive towards you? If NO, when and how did the abuse stop?

22. Remembering back to after incidents when your husband abused you, did he usually apologize? Did he blame you for his actions? What would he say about his behavior?

23. Why do you think that he was/is abusive towards you?

24. Did you and your husband ever take time apart (separate) because of the abuse? If YES, for how long, and where did you go? If NO, did you ever think of separation or divorce as an option? Why or why not?

Thank you for sharing those personal memories/experiences with me. These experiences must (have been) be very difficult for you to endure. I am wondering what sort of support you received from the church and family/friends. At this time I would like to ask you questions about your support systems.

25. Thinking back to when the abuse started, whom did you first tell about your situation? How did they/he/she respond to what you told them?

26. Did you go to your pastor at any time about the abuse? Did you go to **a** pastor? If NO, go to #28. How long had the abuse been going on before you went to your pastor?

27. What sort of help/advice did you receive from the pastor?
Were you happy with this advice?

28. What gender was the pastor with whom you spoke? What influence, if any, do you think your pastor's gender has had on your decision to talk or not talk to him/her?

29. Did people in the church know that you were being abused by your husband? If YES, how did they find out? How did they respond to your situation?

30. Where else did you turn for help? What type of help/advice or support did you receive?

In addition to support services provided by church and friends/ family, I would like to explore your understanding of church teachings and how these have affected your experience of abuse. Some of the questions require you to think back a ways and are somewhat general. Please fell free to elaborate as you see necessary.

31. Thinking back to all the sermons, sunday school lessons and bible studies to which you have been exposed, do you recall the issue of violence against women or violence in the home being addressed?

32. When it comes to teachings about men's and women's roles in the family and church how would you describe the teachings of the church if very liberal was on one end of the continuum and very conservative was on the other? Could you expand or give examples?

33. Again, this question could take a while to answer, but I am wondering if in a few words or sentences you could tell me how you would describe your personal beliefs about male and female roles in the family and church. How would you describe your husband's views on these issues?

34. How well do you and your husband agree on issues concerning male and female roles and responsibilities?

35. As part of Mennonite heritage, pacifism and love have been strong foundations of our faith. How strongly does your church emphasize Mennonite peace theology?

36. This peace theology is usually related to non-violence in times of war. Do you recall if this non-violence has ever been related to family relationships in your church?

37. Could you tell me if and how your experience as an abused woman has been influenced/affected by the Mennonite peace theology?

38. Thinking about your experiences of abuse, what church teachings have been **most** helpful in understanding and dealing with your abusive relationship?

39. What church theological teachings have been **least** helpful to you in understanding and dealing with the abuse?

At this time I am interested in hearing about your personal journey of faith. I would like to understand how your experience of abuse was influenced by and in turn influenced your beliefs and your faith.

40. Could you tell me about how you deal(t) with the abuse? What sort of coping strategies did you use to help you get through it?

41. Have your beliefs and your faith helped you through these tough times? In what way(s)?

42. Has your faith in God and in the church altered through this experience? Could you expand on the ways it has changed.

43. (If the woman has left the abusive relationship): What personal beliefs were most helpful for you in your decision to leave the relationship?

The journey of faith is often a very personal and lonely one. I wonder what the church could do to help women with their journey of acceptance and recovery as they struggle through their abusive relationships.

44. Do you have any suggestions on how the Mennonite church could change so that abused women might receive more support and feel more willing to speak up.

45. Do you think that having women pastors would make a difference to women who might like to talk to their pastor about personal issues?

That almost brings us to the end of the interview, but before we close:

46. Is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to tell me?

47. Could you tell me how this interview experience has been for you?

48. Do you have any comments or suggestions to improve the interview process?

THANK YOU FOR ALL OF YOUR HONEST AND OPEN ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. YOUR TIME HAS BEEN GREATLY APPRECIATED!!

APPENDIX 4: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT:

I have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research project which explores Mennonite women's experiences of wife abuse. I understand that participation in this research requires that I take part in in-depth tape recorded interviews with Ruth Kampen. I understand that all information I provide will remain confidential and anonymous. The tapes will be coded only with a pseudonym or a number, and will only be listened to by the researcher. These tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet, and will either be returned to myself at the completion of the research or will be destroyed.

I have been informed that some of the questions asked will be personal and **may** evoke painful personal memories or feelings. I understand that if any questions are too stressful or intrusive, I do not need to answer them. I also have the freedom to withdraw my participation from this research at any time after signing this form and the information I have given will not be used in the research. I understand that if I have any questions now or at any time during the research process I am free to ask them.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT:

I, Ruth Kampen, am the sole researcher conducting a study to learn more about Mennonite women's experience of wife abuse in the context of their religious beliefs and church teachings. In accordance with ethical regulations for research involving humans, I will make every effort to protect the safety, welfare and rights of my research participants. To do so, all information that I obtain will be held in strictest confidence, and anonymity of participants' is guaranteed. The information received from research participants will be used for my master's thesis and if possible for publication in a scholarly journal or religious publication. The final copy of this thesis will be made available to the research participants if they so desire. In addition, those women who desire to have the taped interview or their

transcription will receive these after the completion of the thesis.

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH. YOUR TIME AND YOUR PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED. IT IS MY HOPE THAT TOGETHER WE CAN KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE.

VITA

Surname: KAMPEN Given Names: RUTH MARIE

Place of Birth: Abbotsford, BC Date of Birth: September 25, 1967

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1989 to 1994
Fraser Valley College	1987 to 1989

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President's Scholarship	1990
Fraser Valley College Transfer Scholarship	1989
Award for Outstanding Achievement (FVC)	1989

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Title of Thesis: Submission, Silence and Shame: Mennonite Women's Experiences of Wife Abuse

Author 

Ruth Kampen

September 12, 1994