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Violence and Abuse in Society

Understanding a Global Crisis

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Chapter 6

Reasons for Staying in Abusive Relationships: A Resource for Understanding Identities

Jessica J. Eckstein

An arguably worldwide cultural expectation exists that recipients[1] of intimate partner violence (IPV) can simply leave abusive relationships at will. However, IPV advocates and researchers—particularly those from a feminist tradition—have recently brought attention to the complexity of leaving abusive circumstances. Whether proceeding through "Stages of Change" (Prochaska and DiClemente 1984) to leave abusive relationships (Burke et al. 2009; Khaw and Hardesty 2009), deciding impulsively to end IPV succinctly and finally, or committing to remain with abusive partners indefinitely, the reasons IPV recipients give for staying in abusive relationships are myriad. Further, these reasons may be indicative of communicative identification and coping processes of people receiving abuse from romantic partners.

Past studies of IPV recipients demonstrated that both men and women cite many reasons for staying: wanting to avoid stigmatizing reactions from others, accusations from professionals for victimization culpability, and derogation and/or denied assistance (i.e., *institutional revictimization*; Dutton 1992) from public service officials or law enforcement. IPV recipients also have reported perceiving a lack of available resources in the form of alternative relationships and/or supportive assistance; excusing abusive partners' behaviors; enacting a "savior" approach toward their abusive partners minimizing their own pain and/or needs; citing a fear of repercussions for leaving the abuser, including stalking, further abuse, and murder; maintaining a commitment to marriage due to religious, traditional, or personal ethical reasons; desiring to protect and remain with their children; hoping for a future change in circumstances; and feeling predominant positive emotions toward the abuser (Davies, Ford-Gilboe, and Hammerton 2009; Eckstein 2009, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d; Ferraro and Johnson 1983). The reasons IPV recipients report for staying are numerous and diverse but, largely, are not dependent on victims' sex.

Initial theorizing, based primarily on experiences with female victims, suggested men and women would differ in the reasons they gave for why they stayed with abusive partners (Wuest and Merritt-Gray 1999). However, recent, explicit examination of sex differences demonstrated that men and women were different only in a few of the reasons given for staying in IPV relationships (Eckstein 2010d; although notably, these differing reasons were those appealing to personal strength, fatherhood, and a desire to protect others). The overwhelming majority of reasons given for staying were not different among men and women. Thus it may not be productive to emphasize sex disparities in terms of how men versus women communicate and cope with their receipt of abuse.

I will propose alternative and arguably more constructive ways to distinguish abuse recipients—and their identification, coping, and communication strategies—than biological sex. I do not claim to have *the* answer to how IPV practitioners should operate, but I do suggest alternative ways to reconceptualize IPV research and how those results are applied to IPV recipients. By looking at the reasons (and corresponding variables) men and women report for why they stay with abusive partners in IPV situations, researchers and practitioners can begin to understand abusive situations in contextual and nuanced ways.

In this chapter, I will explore reasons people give for having stayed in abusive relationships by examining ways—other than biology—to distinguish people's rationales accompanying relational and identity variables. This exploration is presented through past research and presentation of results from my own previously unreported data derived from people's reasons for staying in IPV relationships. Ultimately, my arguments are based on the notion that reasons for staying can serve to fulfill multiple, simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory identities for IPV recipients.

IDENTITY AS INDICATIVE

If we understand *identity* as informed socially, enacted situationally, and represented symbolically (Burke and Reitzes 1981; Goffman 1959), IPV recipients' communicative options are challenging. Certainly, society reacts to people—and IPV recipients are aware of this reaction (e.g., Eckstein 2009, 2010c)—based

not only on their appearances, behaviors, and relationships, but also on how culpable they are believed to be for those circumstances (Goffman 1963). IPV recipients are viewed by society as responsible not only for staying with abusive partners, but in many cases, even for having caused the abuse themselves (Schreiber, Renneberg, and Maercker 2009). As a result, perceived personal responsibility for IPV conditions can exacerbate stigmatizing reactions from others (Weiner, Perry, and Magnusson 1988). The manner in which individuals communicate their identities or situationally enact identity roles may be inseparable from the identity itself. Or in the terms of Goffman (1959), the way we act shapes and is shaped by our own and others' influential understandings of an identity. Therefore, this micro, self-other-revolving and macro, societal-revolving process of identification is particularly salient for those experiencing IPV.

Although they may deliberately or inadvertently reframe past experiences, people's reports of past IPV are informative in a number of ways. First, the words and behaviors people use to convey the past are symbolic. The choice of a particular word (e.g., *survivor* versus *victim*) is laden with political and personal meaning. Next, current, not past, beliefs inform future actions (Frye and Karney 2004). By assessing perceptions of past feelings or behaviors, researchers can observe coping processes on which practitioners can build. It does not matter whether the perceptions reported are "true," as they "actually" occurred, or not. Accounts of past/former IPV delve into ongoing, changing perceptions and internal progressions from staying to leaving (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004). Finally, if staying and leaving are not distinct occurrences, but rather occur on a continuum, then even people "out" of abusive relationships may be at different places in the process of leaving (Wuest et al. 2003). Thus ascertaining past reasons people gave for why they stayed with abusive partners can reveal symbolic, culturally imbued understandings; predict future outcomes; and uncover nuanced differences in the process of staying/leaving abusive situations. With this rationale in mind, rather than focus on theorized differences in the way men versus women manage stay/leave decisions in IPV relationships, it is more constructive to look at distinctions in terms of IPV recipients' *identities*.

THE STUDY

To explore different identity mechanisms, I present results from a study of reasons for staying given by people formerly in IPV relationships. In-depth examination of rationalizations in terms of sex differences was provided in Eckstein (2010d). The information reported here—of associations among IPV characteristics, other relational variables (i.e., stigma, interpersonal gender, relational uncertainty), and reasons for staying—is unique to this chapter and not replicated in other reports of this research.

This chapter's findings were derived from a larger study comprised of $N = 345$ ($n = 239$ females, 106 males) participants who completed a self-report

survey in 2008. English-speaking participants no longer in IPV relationships (characterized by physical and/or psychological abuse) were recruited through Internet postings. After acknowledging informed consent, they completed a thirty- to forty-minute online survey, accessed through a secure server using SSL data encryption and not saving IP addresses. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 72 years of age ($M = 42.12$, $SD = 11.59$), were predominantly White (87.4%), and had as their highest level of education "some college" or a bachelor's degree (59.7%). The abusive relationships on which they reported lasted an average of 8.98 years ($Mdn = 6.75$ years, $SD = 8.06$, *range* = 2 months to 55 years). Additional descriptive characteristics of these abusive relationships are provided in Eckstein (2010a, 2010e, 2010f).

The survey contained, in addition to variables not reported here, a checklist of example items and open-ended questions assessing reasons people gave—to self and to others—for why they stayed with the abusive partners. Additionally, physical abuse received was measured (item frequencies anchored from 0, *Never* to 6, *Always*) with a revised version of the Conflict Tactics Scales 2 (Straus, Hamby, and Warren 2003) and non-overlapping items from the Partner Abuse Scale–Physical (Hudson 1997). Scales ranging from 1 (*Never/Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Always/Strongly Agree*) assessed psychological abuse (Index of Psychological Abuse; Sullivan and Bybee 1999), fear of partner (Peralta and Fleming 2003), gender (Interpersonal Bem Sex Role Inventory; Brems and Johnson 1990), stigma (HIV-stigma scale revised to IPV content; Berger, Ferrans, and Lashley 2001), and stigma management (Link, Mirotznik, and Cullen 1991). Finally, Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) measure of self, partner, and relationship sources of relational uncertainty was used to assess reported uncertainty ranging from 1 (*Completely or almost completely certain*) to 6 (*Completely or almost completely uncertain*). Study-specific psychometric properties of these measures are provided in Eckstein (2010a, 2010e, 2010f).

IDENTITY OPTIONS

For IPV recipients, identification can be practiced (1) internally with oneself or externally with others, (2) by sexed or gendered enactment, (3) according to the type of IPV relationship experienced (abuse characterized by conflict or by coercive control), and (4) as dependent on social and personal ideas of victims versus survivors. In the sections to follow, I incorporate previously unexplored analyses into a discussion of these seemingly dialectical constructs.

Internal and External

On the one hand, communication of identities is largely situationally performative (Butler 2006; Goffman 1959). On the other hand, the repetition of identity performances over time solidifies their presence in the lives of people

enacting them (Burke and Reitzes 1981). Thus, social situations help people shape, as well as be shaped by, their identities and the communication used to convey that sense of self. In every case, this communication is assessed by others in a continual feedback loop (self-other-self). When this occurs, both messages to others and for oneself can be indicative of underlying identity constructs.

For IPV recipients, abuse (an identity-challenging event) in romantic relationships (an identity-shaping context) and the *way* they communicate that experience (its start, maintenance, and/or conclusion) to self (internal identity) and others (external identity) captures underlying identity negotiation at work on multiple levels. Ultimately, coping with abusive relationships—through rationales communicated to self and others (e.g., Schreiber et al. 2009; Smith, Murray, and Coker 2010)—is a complex process revealed dimensionally through people's narrative-reasons.

In this research, participants reported many more reasons used for self than to others (Eckstein 2010d). Although the reason for self-reported least often ("staying to protect the abuser," 26.1% of participants) was reported by many people, most reasons for self were reported as used by more than half of all respondents. The top three reasons people reported using for themselves were that leaving the relationship would have caused them to feel like a failure (used by 73.3% of participants), that they had no one to help them (64.9%), and that they would be embarrassed for someone to find out (63.0%). Notably, participants who were married or had children reported using those reasons (e.g., marriage and/or children as commitment) for self most frequently (66.9% and 78.4%, respectively).

Reasons used with others to rationalize staying were reported much less frequently than reasons used for self. The reason reported least often as used with other people was "not wanting to be perceived as weak for leaving" the partner (with only 9% of respondents reporting use for others). The top three reasons used with other people were a fear of what the partner would do if they left (25.5%), that the IPV was not the abuser's fault (21.7%), and that they had nowhere to go if they left (19.4%). However, for individuals to whom it applied, the reason that their children needed both parents was reported as used with more than double the frequency (41.8%) of most other reasons used for others (Eckstein 2010d).

Internal-External Interaction

Both processes may be at play. In this study, messages used with self and others were similar; participants using a reason for self also were significantly likely (ranging from 14% to 42% increased correlated likelihood from self-use to other-use) to use that reason with others (Eckstein 2010d). These findings lend credence to identities shaped by others as corresponding to self-constructions.

If the reasons IPV recipients used to rationalize staying to themselves were identical to the reasons they told other people, this suggests two possibilities. First, there is a correspondence between self-internalization and messages received from others; this reiterates the notion of identity as a social interaction construction. Additionally (or instead), people may use interactions with others as a forum to bounce off ideas or to "test" the validity of the identities (e.g., savior, religious, committed parent) they self-practice in IPV contexts. In support of these propositions, analyses for this chapter reveal that people who used the reason ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.39$) "I had to be the strong one in the relationship" for self were more likely than those who did not use this reason ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.44$) for self to report feeling stigmatized by their abuse, $t(334) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. A corresponding finding approaching significance was that people who used this same appeal to personal strength as a reason for staying to themselves also were more likely to report secrecy used as a stigma management strategy than were those who did not use this reason for themselves. One interpretation in keeping with social construction of identities could be that appealing to personal strength in their own cognitions was a tactic used by people as self-talk to motivate or reaffirm that they were indeed staying because they were "strong" and so did not need (or feared?) sharing this aspect of their identities with others.

Obviously, when people interact with others, they not only are managing their self-presentations, but are doing so in the context of societal communication rules for what is or is not appropriate (Goffman 1959). Coping with abuse is a process that may certainly occur both externally and internally (Smith et al. 2010). Social constructionist/interactionist understandings suggest IPV recipients are aware of societal expectations that they should leave abusive partners. Knowing they will be stigmatized, they may be more likely to use rationalizations for self that portray themselves as the "savior" or "strong one" in the relationship, rather than the inverse weak victim. Perceptions of weakness and strength are almost certainly also tied to societal expectations for men and women (Butler 2006).

SEX AND GENDER

Identities are cross-situationally specific. In order to operate in this way, people compile multiple aspects of self to enact a "whole" person (Burke 1980). An abuse recipient may have parts of their identity that are not salient in a particular interaction (e.g., employee, student) or may have underlying aspects of their person that can never be separated from any situation (e.g., parent) as in the case of a *master-status* (Becker 1963) or an *engulfing role* (Schur 1971). Gender, or a cultural construction of appropriate identity tied to sex roles, can be viewed as distinct from biological sex and provides an alternative framework for understanding people's IPV experiences. However, controversies

surrounding IPV perpetration-victimization and sex of participants (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010) have shown that caution is necessary when applying findings on victimization, sex, and gender to specific males and females.

Historically, personality characteristics of females were of interest to IPV researchers. Focusing on women in IPV relationships, initial researchers (i.e., with psychodynamic foci) privileged variables that "explained" why women would stay in victimizing situations (Loseke and Cahill 1984). Essentially, early psychologist-researchers attributed fault for continued victimization to the women who "chose" to experience IPV relationships. Due to the fact that this initial research described victimized women as maladaptive, self-destructive, masochistic, and deviant from non-abused women or those who left IPV relationships (Ferraro and Johnson 1983), victim blaming soon became (and still remains, e.g., Suarez and Gadalla 2010) a primary criticism against the psychodynamic approach to IPV. As a result, many IPV researchers (e.g., with feminist foci) began to turn away from psychodynamic approaches and/or instead examined risk factors in ways not implicating victims, particularly in terms of their female-ness.

Gender was another variable examined psychodynamically by viewing IPV victimization as internally precipitated, tied to the inherent characteristics of *feminine* women. Women's sex *and* gender (and accompanying resources; Vyas and Watts 2009) were (and in many worldwide contexts still are; Alhabib, Nur, and Jones 2010; Tang, Wong, and Cheung 2002; Yount and Li 2009) linked to their victimization (Suarez and Gadalla 2010). Femininity and attributes associated with the construct, such as masochism or personal sacrifice, were connected to factors influencing women to stay with their abusive partners. Emotional dependency, poor self-image or low self-esteem, and traditional gender ideologies (e.g., beliefs that children need father figures; views of divorce as stigmatizing) (Dobash and Dobash 1978; Freeman 1979; Langley and Levy 1977) were all variables linked with femininity and, thus, considered vulnerabilities to abuse victimization. In other words, some early psychodynamic researchers linked women's sex not only with victimization but also with negatively viewed personality traits (Loseke and Cahill 1984). However, later research questioned the validity of these findings and the stereotypes of femininity as a victimizing construct (e.g., discovering dependency traits in abused men; Litman 2003) by focusing instead on women's lack of resources worldwide (Alhabib et al. 2010; Vyas and Watts 2009; Yount and Li 2009).

In many cultures, it is an accepted understanding that females are the primary victims. Worldwide, anywhere from 10 to 80 percent of women are physically abused by intimate partners and the prevalence of psychological abuse that exists independently from or accompanies physical violence is estimated to be much higher (Alhabib et al. 2010; Krug et al. 2002). Each year in the United States, at least 5.3 million women are primary IPV recipients (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000).

Whereas women are the predominant IPV recipients in both popular, cultural understandings and in official reports, many men also receive abuse from intimate partners. In the United States, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) reported at least 3.2 million yearly IPV attacks against men as primary recipients. Controversies may surround heterosexual men's IPV receipt (discussed further in subsequent sections), but it is a fact that some men do experience physical and psychological IPV from female partners. IPV research on male recipients has shown that these men feel particularly stigmatized possessing a status (i.e., abuse *victim*) typically attributed to females (Eckstein 2009, 2010c; George 2002, 2003). Ultimately, prior research focusing on sex and/or gender in IPV studies has shown that vulnerability exists in many individuals, not merely feminine women (Dutton 1994; White and Kowalski 1994). Therefore, alternative understandings of IPV victimization are necessary.

Due largely to feminist activists and researchers, in the past 50 years, important changes in societal awareness and action toward domestic issues (i.e., violence toward women and children) have occurred in many nations (Alhabib et al. 2010). Nonetheless, with progressive attention given to interpersonal violence, awareness of the issue in all its complexities is crucial. On the one hand, associating IPV primarily with women is important for females caught in sexist or male-dominated (sub)cultures, arguably present globally. On the other hand, equating female-ness with weakness or victimization can have disastrous implications for women's empowerment and for the IPV, similar in context and kind to women's, received by men. A more nuanced understanding of identities in IPV frameworks is necessary.

Each person has multiple prominent roles and can subscribe to multiple parts of a certain identity. Cultural rule expectations help determine which aspects of self should be referenced in a given situation (Goffman 1959). *How* a man/woman communicates identity (i.e., gender enactment) is then more important than the biological sex "assigned" to him/her. Already reported in data from this sample was the finding that sex was a predictor of IPV outcomes only when also accounting for participants' gender (Eckstein 2010e, 2010f).

Previous research on reasons people gave for staying with abusive partners indicated that men and women (sex) differed on only three out of fourteen reasons used for staying, believed to be tied more to identity constructions (gender) than biological sex (Eckstein 2010d). As shown in these reasons for staying, because IPV-receiving men, who are held to masculine identity expectations, are consequently stigmatized with feminizing gender traits, they interpreted IPV *from* women by reconceptualizing or reasserting their believed-innate (or trying to prove it so) masculinity (Eckstein 2010c).

Additional analyses for this chapter lend further credence to gender as a predictor of IPV experiences more so than biological sex. The few significant gender (i.e., masculinity, femininity) differences in using particular reasons

for staying were not related to sex, but rather to cultural *gender* expectations. For example, people who used the reasons "I had no one to help me" (Users: $M = 5.75$, $SD = 0.78$; Non-users: $M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.88$, $t(343) = 3.70$, $p < .001$), "I had nowhere to go" (Users: $M = 5.80$, $SD = 0.78$; Non-users: $M = 5.46$, $SD = 0.85$, $t(343) = 3.87$, $p < .001$), and "I was too afraid of what he/she might do if I left" (Users: $M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.80$; Non-users: $M = 5.51$, $SD = 0.86$, $t(343) = 3.87$, $p < .05$) were higher in femininity than those who did not use these reasons for themselves. In terms of masculinity, people who communicated to others the reason "It was not his/her fault that he/she hurt me" (Users: $M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.02$; Non-users: $M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.10$, $t(343) = 2.40$, $p < .05$) scored lower on masculinity. No differences emerged by sex in reported use of these reasons.

In most IPV research examining motives for staying, lack of perceived resources, fear of a partner, and making excuses for a partner were all reasons associated solely with female abuse recipients—with female-ness rather than identity-communicated femininity as an explanation (e.g., Davies et al. 2009; Ferraro and Johnson 1983; Lerner and Kennedy 2000). In this study, both men and women reporting each of these reasons scored higher on femininity than people not reporting these reasons for self-rationalizations.

If we can understand gender as an identity embodiment (e.g., Butler 2006), then femininity—when *not* specifically tied solely to women—may be an important predictor of not only specific types of IPV receipt, but also can show which IPV recipients (both men and women) rely on cultural scripts for behavior or IPV rationalization. If certain communicative styles are understood as enactments of a *type* or an *aspect* of identity (e.g., femininity as warm, caring, non-aggressive), rather than embedded within a person's biological sex, then a nuanced, context-driven understanding of IPV can emerge.

INTIMATE TERRORISM AND SITUATIONAL COUPLE VIOLENCE

One of the most recent and arguably elucidating contextual understandings of IPV was provided by Johnson's (1995) typology of abusive relationships. Social-identity arguments have been critiqued for failing to consider the role of power relations in shaping people's identity "choices." People may not be able to simply adopt any identity. However, as shown by Johnson's delineation, social constructionist identity perspectives actually can be useful for understanding varied power relations in IPV.

Two types of IPV relationships relevant to this discussion are *situational couple violence* (SCV), characterized by physical and/or psychological abuse resulting from escalated conflict situations, and *intimate terrorism* (IT), characterized by a perpetrator exerting coercive control (psychologically

and/or physically) over a victim (Johnson 2008). Although both types of abusive relationships can involve physical and psychological abuse and both types of abuse happen to men and women, they are different in a number of key ways. SCV is more likely to be mutually perpetrated by both partners in the relationship, is—based on population studies (e.g., Straus et al. 2003)—more likely to be perpetrated by women, and may be less frequent or patterned (and possibly less severe) in its occurrence than IT. IT, on the other hand, is more likely to involve a sole perpetrator, is—based on national violence studies (e.g., Johnson and Leone 2005)—more likely to be perpetrated by men, and is characterized by severe psychological abuse (and thus fear of and uncertainty about an abusive partner) and physical abuse as a domination tactic (Johnson 2008). Recent studies have shown that rather than using physical or psychological abuse as predictors of IT or male perpetration, per se, it is the presence of coercive control motives that determines both type of IPV (i.e., IT) and perpetrators' sex (i.e., heterosexual men) (Tanha et al. 2010).

Goffman (1959) argued that dominance exertion is conducted to get the most productive outcome; people strive to enact identities best obtaining power. The outcomes of power arrangements are tied to particularly enacted identities and how well they "pass" when "doing" them. The most successful (i.e., powerful) enactments typically conform to situational norms *and* meet identity roles accepted by participants and society (Schur 1980). In IPV contexts, both partners play distinct roles.

In present analyses, many reasons were predictors of physical and/or psychological victimization, fear of partner, and uncertainty about a partner's intentions. People who reported using certain reasons for themselves and/or others were more likely to report variables associated with intimate terrorism (see table 6.1). These results suggest that reasons typically found in IPV stay/leave research on women experiencing partner violence (e.g., Lerner and Kennedy 2000; McDonough 2010; Wuest et al. 2003) that Johnson (2008) would characterize as IT may in fact apply to men *and* women experiencing IT. In such cases, researchers, activists, and applied practitioners would benefit from focusing on IPV relationship types, rather than relying on assumptions based on recipients' biology.

Further, because research to date (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2010; Ross and Babcock 2010) suggests men *are* the primary perpetrators of IT, acknowledging the nuances of IPV relationship types would not unduly redirect attention away from female victims (a fear initially cited by feminist researchers). Instead, attention to nuanced relationships would refocus attention on all victims so that each group obtains the attention and treatment/support appropriate to their condition (e.g., conflict/relationship/communication training for both partners in SCV and in-depth gender/power/violence counseling for IT victims and survivors).

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I would have been a failure if I left the relationship.				
Used for self	4.00 (1.29)	2.40 (1.26)	4.35 (1.48)	4.01 (1.07)
Not used for self	3.38 (1.29)	2.26 (1.21)	3.65 (1.68)	3.64 (1.67)
Mean difference	3.91 (343) ***	0.94 (343)	3.31 (123.16) **	1.98 (343) *
Used for other	4.09 (1.24)	2.32 (1.20)	4.48 (1.40)	4.25 (1.32)
Not used for other	3.79 (1.32)	2.37 (1.26)	4.11 (1.58)	3.85 (1.56)
Mean difference	1.54 (343)	0.30 (343)	1.50 (312)	1.77 (343)
I had no one to help me.				
Used for self	4.17 (1.29)	2.61 (1.32)	4.25 (1.54)	4.32 (1.46)
Not used for self	3.20 (1.11)	1.91 (0.94)	4.01 (1.60)	3.15 (1.38)
Mean difference	7.33 (280.24) ***	5.62 (317.83) ***	1.30 (312)	7.23 (343) ***
Used for other	4.43 (1.19)	2.45 (1.13)	4.63 (1.35)	4.52 (1.36)
Not used for other	3.74 (1.31)	2.35 (1.27)	4.09 (1.58)	3.81 (1.54)
Mean difference	3.44 (343) **	0.52 (343)	2.44 (68.09) *	3.00 (343) **

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships *(continued)*

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I did not want to be perceived as weak.				
Used for self	3.98 (1.29)	2.48 (1.32)	4.28 (1.49)	4.00 (1.48)
Not used for self	3.61 (1.33)	2.19 (1.11)	4.00 (1.66)	3.77 (1.61)
Mean difference	2.58 (343) **	2.09 (343) *	1.50 (240.12)	1.33 (343)
Used for other	4.22 (1.10)	2.63 (1.21)	4.40 (1.56)	4.28 (1.41)
Not used for other	3.80 (1.33)	2.34 (1.25)	4.15 (1.56)	3.87 (1.54)
Mean difference	1.71 (343)	1.27 (343)	0.85 (312)	1.41 (343)
I had nowhere to go.				
Used for self	4.23 (1.33)	2.73 (1.37)	4.32 (1.53)	4.48 (1.44)
Not used for self	3.43 (1.17)	1.99 (0.98)	4.01 (1.58)	3.33 (1.40)
Mean difference	5.96 (337.63) ***	5.79 (311.56) ***	1.81 (312)	7.55 (343) ***
Used for other	4.49 (1.26)	2.70 (1.42)	4.56 (1.41)	4.58 (1.42)
Not used for other	3.68 (1.28)	2.28 (1.19)	4.07 (1.58)	3.75 (1.52)
Mean difference	4.66 (343) ***	2.48 (343) *	2.21 (312) *	4.06 (343) ***

(continued)

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships *(continued)*

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I thought that the abuse was my fault.				
Used for self	4.01 (1.29)	2.50 (1.35)	4.39 (1.51)	4.08 (1.53)
Not used for self	3.65 (1.32)	2.22 (1.12)	3.95 (1.58)	3.73 (1.52)
Mean difference	2.58 (343) **	2.05 (336.53) *	2.55 (312) *	2.19 (343) *
Used for other	4.06 (1.42)	2.54 (1.42)	4.43 (1.58)	4.38 (1.52)
Not used for other	3.80 (1.30)	2.34 (1.22)	4.13 (1.56)	3.84 (1.52)
Mean difference	1.25 (343)	1.01 (343)	1.12 (312)	2.20 (343) *
I had to stay to save him/her.				
Used for self	3.98 (1.36)	2.45 (1.29)	4.09 (1.57)	4.02 (1.42)
Not used for self	3.69 (1.25)	2.28 (1.20)	4.25 (1.56)	3.80 (1.63)
Mean difference	2.05 (343) *	1.31 (343)	0.92 (312)	1.38 (337.53)
Used for other	4.16 (1.27)	2.69 (1.31)	4.26 (1.44)	4.35 (1.45)
Not used for other	3.76 (1.31)	2.29 (1.22)	4.15 (1.59)	3.81 (1.54)
Mean difference	2.22 (343) *	2.29 (343) *	0.49 (312)	2.57 (343) *

(continued)

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships *(continued)*

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I was too afraid of what he/she might do if I left.				
Used for self	4.16 (1.32)	2.68 (1.32)	4.10 (1.63)	4.47 (1.39)
Not used for self	3.36 (1.15)	1.90 (0.97)	4.28 (1.46)	3.09 (1.36)
Mean difference	6.00 (323.75) ***	6.33 (341.15) ***	1.02 (312)	9.11 (343) ***
Used for other	4.52 (1.23)	2.83 (1.34)	4.19 (1.65)	4.73 (1.29)
Not used for other	3.60 (1.26)	2.20 (1.18)	4.16 (1.53)	3.63 (1.51)
Mean difference	5.96 (343) ***	4.20 (343) ***	0.16 (312)	6.14 (343) ***
I had to stay to protect him/her.				
Used for self	3.92 (1.34)	2.48 (1.28)	4.10 (1.60)	3.93 (1.47)
Not used for self	3.80 (1.30)	2.32 (1.23)	4.19 (1.55)	3.90 (1.56)
Mean difference	0.75 (343)	1.03 (343)	0.42 (312)	0.15 (343)
Used for other	4.63 (1.21)	2.85 (1.22)	4.33 (1.58)	4.34 (343)
Not used for other	3.75 (1.30)	2.31 (1.24)	4.16 (1.56)	4.16 (1.56)
Mean difference	3.71 (343) ***	2.36 (343) *	0.54 (312)	1.69 (343)

(continued)

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships *(continued)*

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I was too embarrassed for someone to find out.				
Used for self	4.14 (1.24)	2.59 (1.30)	4.28 (1.52)	4.15 (1.44)
Not used for self	3.33 (1.28)	2.00 (1.07)	3.98 (1.61)	3.51 (1.61)
Mean difference	5.86 (343) ***	4.59 (314.60) ***	1.66 (312)	3.84 (343) ***
Used for other	4.30 (1.37)	2.74 (1.27)	4.55 (1.44)	4.69 (1.51)
Not used for other	3.76 (1.29)	2.30 (1.24)	4.10 (1.57)	3.78 (1.50)
Mean difference	2.69 (343) **	2.26 (343) *	1.79 (312)	3.90 (343) ***
My religion would not allow me to leave.				
Used for self	4.13 (1.26)	2.29 (1.15)	4.62 (1.28)	4.30 (1.16)
Not used for self	3.37 (1.23)	2.06 (1.14)	3.92 (1.45)	3.65 (1.50)
Mean difference	3.26 (112) **	1.06 (112)	2.62 (102) **	2.61 (112) **
Used for other	4.19 (1.27)	2.18 (1.08)	5.02 (1.00)	4.34 (1.04)
Not used for other	3.68 (1.29)	2.18 (1.17)	4.11 (1.43)	3.92 (1.42)
Mean difference	1.71 (112)	0.01 (112)	3.38 (43.23) **	1.33 (112)

(continued)

Table 6.1
Differences in IPV variables by sse for self and other of reasons for staying in abusive relationships *(continued)*

Reason	Psychological victimization	Physical victimization	Uncertainty about partner	Fear
I believe marriage should last forever, no matter what.				
Used for self	4.03 (1.30)	2.47 (1.26)	4.41 (1.49)	4.22 (1.41)
Not used for self	3.48 (1.25)	2.06 (1.09)	4.06 (1.43)	3.69 (1.58)
Mean difference	2.68 (179) **	2.18 (179) *	1.46 (164)	2.26 (179) *
Used for other	4.47 (1.19)	2.55 (1.18)	4.63 (1.42)	4.62 (1.44)
Not used for other	3.58 (1.28)	2.23 (1.22)	4.15 (1.48)	3.79 (1.46)
Mean difference	4.29 (180) ***	1.61 (180)	1.88 (165)	3.48 (180) **
My children needed both parents.				
Used for self	4.05 (1.28)	2.33 (1.16)	4.53 (1.36)	4.11 (1.36)
Not used for self	3.30 (1.32)	2.22 (1.30)	3.99 (1.57)	3.74 (1.68)
Mean difference	3.37 (192) **	0.52 (192)	2.15 (175) *	1.48 (192)
Used for other	4.12 (1.24)	2.31 (1.15)	4.52 (1.28)	4.32 (1.35)
Not used for other	3.72 (1.36)	2.30 (1.22)	4.31 (1.52)	3.82 (1.47)
Mean difference	2.09 (192) *	0.09 (192)	1.00 (170.80)	2.43 (192) *

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS

Abuse recipients may shift back and forth between identity roles, depending on the situation. Over time, both "chosen" and "forced" identity constructs can shape the nature of life for abuse recipients (Chang 1989). To understand concepts of victim/survivor, it is important to recognize that people may be victimized not only by abusive partners, but also (or further) can be created as a "victim" by societal construal of the construct itself (Lamb 1999; Tang et al. 2002). These dynamics become particularly important when considering abuse recipients as *victims* versus *survivors*, roles laden with serious, historical implications.

As argued by Deaux (1993), a both/and (i.e., social/situational and personal/cultural) perspective of identity, rather than an either/or understanding, is most helpful. When applied to IPV contexts, identity is irremovable from others' judgments or situational influences (e.g., stigma), but strong affiliation with a particular group status or identity role (e.g., survivor) can influence people to such an extent that situations exert minimal control over their communication, feelings, or behaviors. In such cases, the act of labeling—by oneself and others—a "victim" is "embedded in social relationships and also internalized . . . victims are imprisoned in cultural constructions of their victimization imposed from within as well as from without" (Lamb 1999, 4; Baly 2010).

In analyses for this chapter, people who did not use ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.55$) the reason "I did not want to be perceived as weak" for themselves reported significantly higher levels of self-uncertainty than those who did use ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.53$) this reason for themselves, $t(313) = 2.06, p < .05$. Actually reporting an internal desire to not appear weak (for leaving and/or being abused) was tied to feeling more confident in terms of personal relationship expectations. People who used this reason for staying with an abusive partner may have consciously acclimated to society's conceptions. Cultural understandings of relationship-leavers are of people not strong enough to hold it together or of pushovers willing to put up with IPV rather than setting out into the world alone (e.g., the devil they know versus the unknown).

Certainly, some respondents, through reasons rationalizing staying to themselves, fell under cultural understandings of victims as weak. Corresponding to this societal understanding, compared to those who did not use the reasons for themselves, higher levels of relationship uncertainty were reported by those who did use the reasons "I thought the abuse was my fault" (Users: $M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.20$; Non-Users: $M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.37$; $t(312) = 3.64, p < .001$) and "I was too embarrassed for someone to find out" (Users: $M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.27$; Non-Users: $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.35$; $t(312) = 2.30, p < .05$) for themselves. Thus, not knowing the future of the relationship was tied to people internalizing blame (a victim-trait) and feeling stigmatized for their abuse victimization.

However, it is important to realize that victim-survivor, much like staying-leaving, are fluid concepts. Even people striving to overcome past IPV with

survivor identities may still have days or experiences in which they feel victimized again (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004). Although the extent to which people (e.g., IPV recipients) identify with certain roles predicts their likelihood of referencing that role in a given interaction (Tajfel and Turner 1986), it is never predetermined or static once "decided." In one context, a reason for staying to oneself may indicate victimization, whereas the same reason used with other people could indicate survivorship (Baly 2010). Or, in other words, a study of IPV should include examination of when "being an object of violence or coercion [is] . . . the same thing as being a *victim* of such violence or coercion" (Gavey 1999, 57).

In results analyzed for this chapter, reasons reported *to others* differed from all previous reasons discussed in key ways. Rather than influencing selves, people who reported particular reasons to others may be sending identity messages of survivorship (Baly 2010). Compared to those who did not communicate these reasons to others, higher levels of relationship uncertainty (about a future with this person, compared to self-doubt or fear/doubt about the abuser) were experienced by those who used the reasons "My religion would not allow me to leave" (Users: $M = 4.91$, $SD = 0.95$; Non-Users: $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.36$; $t(43.58) = 2.32, p < .05$), "I believe marriage should last forever, no matter what" (Users: $M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.18$; Non-Users: $M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.36$; $t(165) = 2.24, p < .05$), and "I was too embarrassed for someone to find out" (Users: $M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.20$; Non-Users: $M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.32$; $t(312) = 2.07, p < .05$).

Telling other people they may have left "if not for" religious or traditional commitments and/or *telling* people they were embarrassed (a seemingly antithetical stigma management strategy) separates them from the "typical victim," as construed by society. Through a willingness to leave, were they not bound by forces outside their power, or through a readiness to actually tell their *trauma stories*, these people may have used such reasons communicated to others as a "reminder of the necessity of continual struggle" (a survivor-trait), to "renew collective identity" with other survivors, or to claim "entitlement" on par with the non-abused population at large (Haaken 1999, 23). By setting themselves apart from victims, the reasons communicated to others may have served as a form of impression management, one in which the message is striving to be anti-victim/pro-survivor (e.g., Baly 2010; Campbell and Adams 2009), a tactic valued in our culture.

On the other hand, this attempt at distinguishing oneself from other "victims" may have actually reinforced cultural notions of victims as long-suffering, stay-to-the-end individuals (Baly 2010; Tang et al. 2002). As Lamb (1999) notes, victims often fervently deny that they *are* victims, or in the case of male IPV victims, that they are the victims of partner abuse, preferring to be victims of "society" rather than mere women (Eckstein 2010c).

As shown in these cases, people can identify in terms of *social* designations (e.g., victim) or in terms of affiliation with dominantly accepted groupings, or

they may distinguish themselves in terms of *personal* designations (e.g., survivor) by separating themselves as unrelated (intentionally or unintentionally) to deviant others (Deaux 1993). Or, as is often the case with recipients of IPV, they are both victims *and* survivors (Lamb 1999).

CONCLUSION

It is believed that most people do ultimately leave abusive relationships (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005; McDonough 2010). Indeed, every participant in this study was looking back on past situations. But the process of leaving may be long and arduous (Burke et al. 2009). The longer people remain with abusers, the more likely it is they will be blamed for doing so, and with the positive presence of increased societal visibility of victim services, people staying are provided fewer societal waivers when they do remain with partners (Renzetti 1999). Recognizing the intricacy of getting out (if that is indeed what the IPV recipient desires—see Burke et al. 2009 for a discussion of how "decisions to leave" may differ), people's reasons for staying—communicated to self and others—can be explored for their associations with other variables relevant to models of abuse intensity, frequency, coping, and relational and identity management.

In this chapter, I examined a variety of alternatives for conceptualizing people experiencing abuse. I am resistant to the notion that, due to political forces or potential misinterpretation of IPV findings (although these *can* be used to harm IPV recipients and *may* hurt advocacy), we should focus only on female recipients of severe IPV. Instead, examining male and female reasons for staying can: show us the differences and similarities in how people manage their identities and cope (successfully or not) with having been abused; allow understudied (e.g., males) abuse recipients to gain exposure and permit currently focused-upon (e.g., females) abuse recipients to gain nuanced aid in terms of personal styles and cultural scripts for masculine and feminine communication norms; extend IPV theorizing regarding types of abusive relationships and in turn challenge naysayers who see all abuse as "mutual" and/or occurring in a context free of gender-power relations (both interpersonal dominance and social hegemony); and ultimately, provide a way to re-envision notions of victims and survivors.

Reasons for staying may not necessarily be excuses—to oneself or to others. Rather, reasons for staying may be tools for abuse recipients to seek agency. Communicating abuse rationales—intrapersonally by contemplation (Smith et al. 2010) or interpersonally through conversations, writing, or even participating in research like this (Campbell and Adams 2009)—may be a method of survival (Lamb 1999) or mere "social practice" (Marecek 1999). Whatever the "truth," it is clear that IPV recipients' reasons for staying are powerful—for researchers, for advocates, and for themselves.

NOTE

1. To differentiate from my use of "victim" and "survivor" as distinct terms, laden with meaning, in this chapter, I use the general term "recipient" to refer to anyone having experienced abuse from their romantic partner.

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