

WHEN WOMEN USE FORCE:

AN ADVOCACY GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THIS ISSUE AND CONDUCTING AN ASSESSMENT WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE USED FORCE TO DETERMINE THEIR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES FROM A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY

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In the last few years an increasing number of women have been arrested for assaulting their male partners. Additionally, research proclaiming that “women are just as violent as men” continues to attract media attention. Historically, most domestic violence advocacy programs have not had clear policies and protocols for addressing these situations nor have they been prepared to respond effectively to inquiries about this discrepancy. It is clear that most domestic violence victims are women¹, yet many communities are reporting arrest rates of women as high as 20% of all arrests for domestic violence. It is time for domestic violence advocacy programs to take steps to address this issue. This paper will discuss the use of force by women and assessment strategies for determining if a woman who has used force is a battered woman.

There are female batterers. There are women who batter their female partners and women who batter their male partners. However, most battering is perpetrated by men and most male victims of battering are being battered by their male partner. Consequently, there is dissonance between this reality and the disproportionate percentage of women being arrested for using force with their current or former male partners.

Part of this discrepancy is explained by clarifying terminology—the legal definition of domestic violence is quite different than the definition employed by domestic violence service providers. In Michigan, the crime of domestic violence is defined as the criminal use of force, or the immediate threat of force, by one person on another person to whom the perpetrator has the legal definition of a “domestic relationship.” A domestic relationship includes people who are married or formerly married, people who live together or formerly lived together, and people who have a child in common.

Domestic violence, when defined by a domestic violence service provider, focuses on the context² of the entire relationship—it is not limited to one particular incident. A domestic violence relationship is defined as a pattern of abusive behavior—

¹ Women are five to eight times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner. U.S. Department of Justice. **Violence By Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends.** March 1998.

² This paper was developed prior to, and independent of, Ellen Pence's most recent work in this area. Those interested in this topic should read her most recent manual on conducting a community and safety audit. It's available from the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project.

including physical, emotional, and verbal abuse, as well as a myriad of other abusive and controlling tactics—used by one person to obtain and maintain power and control over their current or former intimate partner.

Police are required by law to make a determination of the "perpetrator" of a criminal assault based primarily upon the physical evidence and each party's description of *what occurred in the specific incident*³. This places them at a disadvantage because they typically do not have the context or the history of criminal and other abusive behaviors in the relationship to assist them in making their decision.

Domestic violence service providers are most interested in the history of the entire relationship and determining the "batterer"—the *perpetrator of the pattern of abusive behaviors*. **Because domestic violence service providers are looking at the overall relationship, their determination of which party is the "batterer" and which is the "survivor" requires more than just a determination of who sustained physical injuries in a given incident.** To determine which party is the "batterer" the service provider must explore which party uses physical violence, in addition to tactics from the power and control wheel, to establish and maintain control in the relationship. Consequently, there are many times that the service provider's assessment of which party is the "survivor" and which is the "batterer" in a given relationship, is very different than the police department, and/or prosecutor's judgment of who is the "victim" and who is the "perpetrator" in a given incident.

The use of violence in any relationship should never be encouraged or condoned, even when it is not battering. All force or violence is used for a purpose. The difference lies in an exploration of that purpose—what the individual intended to accomplish by using force. In domestic violence situations, batterers use violence intentionally and consistently to get what they want. Batterers use violence to intimidate their partners, to teach their partners how they expect them to behave, and to prevent or punish their partners for "disobeying" them. Battered women who use force⁴ also do so for a purpose, but that purpose is not related to obtaining and maintaining power and control in the relationship. In order to make an accurate assessment, an advocate must be able to recognize and understand that there are many reasons why a survivor of domestic force may use force in specific instances.

Most battered women use force at some point during their relationship. Battered women use a multiplicity of strategies to stop or prevent the violence, or to escape. At some point, almost all battered women have pushed or shoved their batterer in an attempt to escape after an assault. (And, if asked by a police officer, "Is it true that you

³ In making the decision to arrest, most police agencies require their officers to make a determination of probable cause. While visible injuries or the lack-there-of is only one of a number of criteria for determining probable cause, visible injuries are too often the primary factor used in making this determination

⁴ Note the differentiation between the terms force and violence. According to Webster's Dictionary, violence is defined as "rough or injurious physical force," "an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power." Thus, violence can be defined as a type of force, used unjustly, with the intention of causing injury. Force itself is descriptive of the use of physical strength to accomplish a task—but does not imply the same degree of wrong-doing or harmful intent.

pushed him?" They will answer, "yes"). Many battered women have bit or scratched their batterer in an attempt to get free when they are strangled, held down or restrained. Probably at least one third of battered women have picked up a knife and told their batterer to leave them alone or get out in order to avoid or interrupt an assault.

On a more universal level, most people, when assaulted, are likely to try fighting back, it is a natural, human response to try to protect one's self from attack.

How often battered women use force frequently depends on the reaction they receive as a result of that use of force. Some battered women try using force to fight back but find that they are assaulted more severely by their batterer when they do so. Some battered women find that the use of force prevents them from being severely injured. Because this strategy can at times be effective, they will try using it again. Many battered women do not use force at first. Over time, they discover that non-forceful methods of resistance have not been effective in keeping them safe, so they may try using force to protect themselves. **Some battered women have repeatedly called the police seeking protection. This has not worked, so they decide they must use force to protect themselves**

When battered women use force they do so for a number of reasons. The following reflect some of the most common reasons:

- ◆ Self-defense, including escape attempts
- ◆ As response to batterers' use of force—to stop or dissuade him from continuing to assault her
- ◆ Pre-emptive—if she believes an assault is imminent, some battered women may try to "induce" the incident to get over the tension of waiting and/or to gain some control over when and where the assault takes place. A battered woman may try to "induce" an assault in an effort to potentially minimize the harm, embarrassment, and disruption to their schedule that the assault will cause. Pre-emptive force offers battered women some semblance of control over their situation.
- ◆ Because not using force hasn't kept them safe
- ◆ Retaliation for a history of abuse

When battered women make the choice to use force they are often arrested and/or charged with crimes. **The single most common reason that battered women are arrested is that law enforcement has not accurately identified their use of force as self-defense.** It is the role of advocates to assist police in getting the training and consultation they need to accurately assess for and identify self-defense.

Sometimes battered women are arrested and/or charged because their use of force constitutes a criminal act (that is, it cannot be categorized as self-defense).

However, it is equally, if not more, common for battered women to be arrested and/or charged for using force in ways that are not necessarily criminal acts. This is where a thorough assessment is vital in making a determination of how to handle individual situations. The advocacy agency must get an accurate and complete picture of the incident and the power and control dynamics (if any exist) within the relationship. The agency must also assess who used force, what types of force were used, and for what purpose.

The police often suggest that domestic violence agencies have a double standard: that women should not be arrested for using force in a violent relationship, but that men should be. Here is where advocates, and domestic violence organizations must be clear about their goals and values. When a domestic violence agency advocates for a battered woman charged with using force, it does not automatically mean that the agency believes that the battered woman was wrongly arrested and/or should not have been charged.

Domestic violence agencies believe that battered women should not be arrested or charged for defending themselves, for resisting attack, or for using force to prevent or retreat from an attack.

Secondly, when a long-term victim of domestic violence uses force in a criminal manner (preemptive or retaliatory), consideration in charging and sentencing should be given to the person who is the long-term victim. It is (again) critical that a long-term history be taken from the victim. The criminal justice system personnel can then understand how the long-term victim—who is the defendant in this case—perceived and reacted to the situation from which the charges stem

Battered women's service providers must examine their own attitudes about when battered women use force. There are widespread prejudices about battered women, some of which become internalized and severely hinder the ability to deliver compassionate and appropriate services to some battered women. Survivors are placed in a no win situation, a catch-22. If she uses force in self-defense, or "worse yet", in a retaliatory and criminal manner, she is seen as a bad, dangerous person and is placed outside the purview of our services. However, if she never physically resists, there is often an underlying attitude expressed as "what's wrong with her?" "She must like it;" "she's a doormat". Advocates may be concerned that law enforcement will be upset that they are "advocating for a criminal". These situations are undeniably difficult and each case requires significant analysis. However, advocacy agencies must not back down from complicated situations and they must not deny services to a battered woman who has used force because they do not want to deal with responses from law enforcement and the court system. If the advocate assesses that the woman who used force is a battered woman in a domestic violence relationship, they should advocate for her.

When battered women use force to resist attack, to free themselves, or to retreat from an attack they are often likely to leave visible injuries. This is one of the problems with police officers weighing visible injury so heavily when making the determination of probable cause. We must remember that batterers (as opposed to someone who might use force in an individual incident) are making conscious decisions about what kinds of

injuries to inflict. Batterers who are familiar with the criminal justice system are often aware of the weight that visible injury, or lack thereof, is given. Batterers report tailoring their assaults so as not to leave visible injuries. They will choose not to inflict injuries in places that can be easily seen (such as the back of the battered woman's head), or will inflict injuries in places that the battered woman will not be comfortable showing the injuries to the police, such as her chest or genital area. Additionally, battered women who are dark skinned are less likely to show immediate redness or bruising and the batterer knows that.

For example, if a survivor is being strangled or restrained, she may try to bite or scratch her batterer in order to get free. When the police arrive, the batterer may have very visible scratches and/or bite marks on him that may have even drawn blood. It is unlikely that bruises from the injuries that the survivor has received will be visible yet. (And we know that strangling is a favorite tactic of batterers, BECAUSE it usually leaves no immediate signs and because of the terror factor – nearly every time she wonders whether she will die).

Correspondingly, because men on average are larger than women, there frequently exists an imbalance of strength during a physical assault in mixed gender relationships. For this reason, a battered woman may pick up an object to use as a weapon in order to free herself from the batterer who is strangling or restraining her, to fend the batterer off while she calls 911, or to get out of the home. Some battered women report that they have picked up a weapon in hopes of scaring the batterer in an effort to deter or end an assault. In situations where the battered woman picks up a weapon or object, the police may interpret the battered woman's behavior to be "more aggressive" or "more dangerous" because she was using a weapon while the batterer was "only" using his hands and feet.

If a battered woman uses the weapon or object, she is significantly more likely to leave a visible injury. If the battered woman hits the batterer over the head with a lamp or other object to get him to stop strangling her, this action is likely to leave a mark on the batterer (especially because as she is struggling to breathe she can not make decisions about where to hit her partner that won't leave marks.) Her desperate attempts to stop the violence may result in broken property that will also be visible evidence of use of force. Additionally, it is quite common for batterers to sustain injuries to their hands when they take knives, by the blade, out of the battered woman's hand. Doing this indicates two things: first, the batterer is not in fear of the battered woman or he would not approach her to remove the weapon this way; and second, the batterer is demonstrating to the battered woman that she cannot scare him and that he will risk injuring himself if it means getting to her—in other words, defending herself against his attacks is futile.

While battered women may pick up weapons in an effort to deter the batterer, in reality, their action may place them in greater danger. Once they have introduced an object/weapon into the incident, they may feel they must use it or risk the batterer using it on them. Battered women who wound or kill their batterers are often not believed to have been acting in self-defense because they did not respond to the attack with "equal and opposite" force. However, self-defense must be correlated to relative strength and perceived danger. When interviewed, most survivors who have killed their batterer

report that they did not want to kill the batterer but that they believed their life was in danger—they report that it is not that they wanted the batterer to die, but that they wanted to live.

Batterers often try to manipulate their partner into pushing or hitting them first in order to give him "justification" for "defending themselves" by assaulting her. A batterer may corner the battered woman or block a doorway so that she must push past him to get away. He will then use this as a justification for an assault that may leave broken bones. A batterer may get in the battered woman's face and try to incite her by saying degrading or incendiary things repeatedly until she pushes him away or in some way strikes him. Once the battered woman pushes the batterer, the batterer feels justified in assaulting her because she has "initiated" the "fight" and he is merely "defending" himself. In this instance, the battered woman made a bad choice⁵. Striking the batterer is not an acceptable response to his verbal abuse; additionally, it is against the law. However, this act of criminal assault does not make her the batterer. Frequently, when the police arrive and find that the battered woman pushed the batterer first, they will arrest her because she was the "initial aggressor," even if she has ended up significantly more injured⁶.

Advocacy organizations must help the criminal justice system understand that women who are victims in general admit their use of force readily. Batterers (female or male) generally lie about their behavior.

Battered women typically take responsibility for their "part" in an assault. Battered women may feel less comfortable with the police officers than the batterer does because they (the batterer and the police) are usually both male. Therefore, the battered woman will not typically tell the police what the batterer was doing prior to her making physical contact with him. When asked, "Did you push him first?" the battered woman will answer "yes" unlike a batterer who will either deny what he did, or try to justify his behavior; "Yes, but she going crazy and I was just trying to calm her down."

While violence is never an acceptable way for people to express anger, there will be times when a battered woman uses physical force to protect herself or to attempt to avoid an assault or further injury. Just because an individual used some form of physical force in a particular incident they should not be automatically categorized as a batterer. A detailed assessment must be conducted to determine that in the given incident the individual used force as a means of obtaining or reinforcing power and control over their partner and, that that same individual routinely uses other forms of intimidation and abuse in order to establish and maintain power and control over their intimate partner.

⁵ Battered women are not perfect. They may make choices that look bad, that hurt their case, and that upset us. These actions do not negate the reality of their victimization, nor their need for help.

⁶ In response to this, some police departments are focusing more on determining the primary aggressor as opposed the initial aggressor. The term primary aggressor refers to the person who was most aggressive or assaultive throughout the incident as opposed to the more limited determination of who committed the first physical act.

CONDUCTING A QUICK AND ROUTINE ASSESSMENT

The following are guidelines for conducting an assessment with a person (male or female) who has used force in an intimate relationship to determine if they are the batterer or the survivor in the context of the entire relationship. In the past, domestic violence agencies have relied heavily on gender in making this determination of who is eligible for their services. This must change. Experts agree that the majority of perpetrators of violence are male, and that when victims are male, their perpetrator is also usually male. However, there are exceptions to every rule.

Batterers (male and female) have called domestic violence agency hotlines pretending to be the "victim" for a variety of motives—to prevent their partner from seeking services by preempting the "victim status", to get evidence for a custody battle, or to discredit the domestic violence hotline. Victims of domestic violence (usually women) are being arrested (and convicted) at alarmingly increasing rates. Groups for "female batterers" have sprung up throughout the country with group members who everyone agrees are really battered women. Lesbians and gay men are identifying battering in their relationships and are looking to domestic violence programs for assistance. Therefore, it is even more of an error than ever for domestic violence agencies to primarily rely on gender when screening for eligibility for services.

Survivors of domestic violence experience very similar patterns and types of abusive behavior. These similarities are consistent across gender lines. (as well as lines of race, culture, class, age, demographic area, socio-economic status).⁷ Consequently, when conducting assessments regarding allegations of domestic violence, utilizing some basic strategies and looking for consistent indicators will yield accurate results when assessing if a woman is battered by a man, if a man is battered by a woman, if a woman is battered by a woman, and if a man is battered by a man.⁸

Because domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors, one incident of physical force or violence does not necessarily constitute a battering relationship. A determination of who did what to whom in a given incident is not enough information to make a determination of who is the batterer and who is the survivor. Battering is about entitlement. Batterers believe they are entitled to their partner's obedience, attention, loyalty, servitude, etc. Batterers believe that their partner has no right to life without them. Batterers believe that they have the right to make rules for their partner and that they have the right to punish their partner for not obeying their rules.⁹ It is this insight

⁷ However, there are special issues for survivors from different backgrounds. The batterer will always use anything he can to harass and control his partner. A batterer with a partner who uses a wheelchair will dismantle the ramp, preventing her from seeking help. A batterer who is a lesbian will threaten to disclose her partner's sexual orientation to a homophobic boss. A batterer whose partner is deeply religious will quote the Bible in support of his terrorism. Survivors of color will experience racism in their search for help. A survivor who does not speak English may not be able to tell the police what happened.

⁸ Again, questions can be incorporated that reflect the special issues of lesbians and gay men. Did your partner threaten to out you? Did your male partner threaten to infect you with HIV?

⁹ Hart, Barbara. *Rule Making in Battering Relationships*.

into the dynamics of battering that helps us recognize that there cannot be two batterers in a relationship. Nor can the partners switch off battering each other, nor can there be a mutually battering relationship. A domestic violence relationship has one consistent batterer and one consistent survivor. A survivor of domestic violence may use force in specific instances but this does not make that person a batterer. Batterers consistently use a combination of physical violence, psychological terrorism, verbal and emotional abuse, isolation, intimidation, sexual abuse, economic control, etc. to control their partner.

This guide will assist advocates in making a determination of whether an individual is a batterer or a survivor. Keep in mind that **no one question or concept alone will determine whether or not someone is telling the truth and/or whether they are a batterer.** Every individual must be interviewed thoughtfully and thoroughly in order to make as informed a determination as possible.

1) GET A CLEAR DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED

Obtain a detailed description of the entire incident from the person you are interviewing. From the description, you should be able to visualize and explain to someone else what happened from start to finish. A person that is telling the truth, should be able to give a step by step account of what happened including very specific details because they are retelling a recent event from memory. They can do this because they are not making up the incident or the details as they go along. Most survivors will be able to describe an assault so you can picture the chronology of events and where each person was at various points of the incident. A batterer's refusal to be accountable for his/her abuse will cause him/her to lie to you and will make it difficult for him/her to give you a clear picture of what happened. If the person is consistently vague, avoids answering your questions, or changes the subject, you are probably talking to a batterer.

Similarly, someone who has truly just been assaulted will (almost always) want to talk about their experience. After a traumatic event it is common for people to go over the incident repeatedly in an attempt to sort out what happened. It is also common for a survivor of domestic violence to want to talk about other abusive things that their partner has done to them over the course of the relationship in an effort to understand what has happened, and is happening, to them.

If the person you are talking to seems disinterested in talking about the recent incident, and **especially** if the person is more interested in talking about topics entirely unrelated to their relationship or the incident, this is an indication that the person is not concerned about what happened. The person is probably not upset because they are not being abused. They are likely to be the person that is in control in the relationship and the person who is perpetrating the abuse. As a result, they have a good understanding of what is going on. They don't need to process what they have experienced. They are likely to be feeling good. Not only are they successfully getting away with abusing their partner, BUT, as a added "bonus," their partner has been arrested. **The batterer can now harangue his partner with the litany that no one will believe them, they are the abusive and crazy one, etc.** Along the same lines, be

aware if the person you are speaking with seems uncomfortable with the attention focused on them and makes repeated efforts to turn the attention towards you and to reverse the roles so they are leading the conversation and attempting to "interview" you. This is a sign that they are trying to hide something and that they are concerned you will discover something about them (e.g. that they are the actual batterer) that they do not want you to find out.

If the person gives unclear or vague answers or tries to change the subject, the advocate must remain focused and persistent and ask the questions again. Ask specific and concrete questions. The advocate must stay in charge of the progress of the assessment and must keep the focus of the discussion on the interviewee. The advocate can tell the person they are speaking with that they are asking so many questions because they need to have an understanding of their situation and relationship in order to determine how they (the advocate) can be most helpful to the interviewee and what services they may be able to offer (e.g. survivor's services or batterer's services).

2) QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- ◆ Was there an argument?
- ◆ Tell me what happened?
- ◆ Why/How did it start?
- ◆ What did you do?
- ◆ What did she/he?
- ◆ How did you respond?
- ◆ How do you feel about what happened today?
- ◆ At this point how are you feeling about your relationship as a whole?
- ◆ Has this happened before?
- ◆ What happened then?
- ◆ What types of thing do you argue about?
- ◆ What things about your partner/about what your partner does upset you?
- ◆ What does your partner get upset at you about?
- ◆ When you disagree with your partner what does she/he do?
- ◆ When your partner disagrees with you what does she/he do?
- ◆ How does she/he feel about your friends/family/work/school/children/pets?
- ◆ How do you feel about her/his friends/family/work/school/children/pets?
- ◆ Has she/he ever shoved you?
- ◆ Have you ever shoved her/him?
- ◆ Has she/he ever restrained you?
- ◆ Have you ever had to restrain her/him?
- ◆ Has she/he ever punched a hole in the wall or your destroyed possessions?
- ◆ Has she/he ever prevented you from leaving the house?
- ◆ Have you ever prevented her/him from leaving the house?
- ◆ Has she ever threatened you?
- ◆ Has she ever assaulted another partner?

◆ **Are you afraid of your partner?**

Some survivors will tell you that they are not afraid of their partners¹⁰. This may be because they do not want to be seen as a "weak" person or, in comparison to past violence experienced, this does not seem as severe. Most survivors are, to varying extents, afraid of their batterers. Almost all batterers, because they are IN control and use violence as a method of control, are not afraid of their partners. In fact, many batterers do not regard the violent incidents as scary or even upsetting. Most batterers will be so UN-concerned with the incident that they will appear almost blasé and uninterested in talking about the incident. Instead they want to talk with you about entirely unrelated subjects. For example, one batterer I met with did not want to talk about the assault but preferred instead to tell me what a great cook he was, how much he loved to fish and listen to classical music.

◆ **If the person says that they are afraid, ask for specifics of what they are afraid she/he might do?**

Get SPECIFICS. Any person can try to give the "correct" answer—to say "Yes" they are afraid and "Yes" their partner is emotionally abusive. A true survivor will be able to give numerous examples and be very specific about things their partner has done to be abusive and intimidating toward them. Additionally, when asked for more detail, a batterer will often "slip up" and admit to beliefs they hold, in engage in actions,¹¹ and tell specific things that they have done to their partner that are consistent with battering behaviors and tactics. Batterers do this because they do not regard their behavior or beliefs as inappropriate—they believe they are entitled to act that way and that their actions are justifiable.

◆ **What do you do when you think that your partner is mad at you? What have you done to minimize the problems/stop the violence?**

In response to this question, many survivors will describe ways in which they have modified their own behavior, for instance: "I never let myself get angry, I just let him say what he wants," "I do what he says," or "I try to stay out of his way." All of these responses indicate she believes the violence happens because of something she is doing, and therefore, if she changes her behavior, the violence will stop—this is what the batterer wants her to believe.

¹⁰ When talking to some one who you have ascertained to be a survivor who says that they are not afraid of their partner, ask them if they believe that their partner wants or is trying to frighten, intimidate, and control them. Batterering tactics are more about what the batterer hopes and intends to gain from the use of the tactic than how successful they are at accomplishing their goal.

¹¹ One batterer I was interviewing pounded on the table while engaging in a diatribe about how all he required was a little respect. (Because survivors are rarely treated with respect by the batterer a survivor is extremely unlikely to tell you this—most likely she has stopped ever hoping or feeling that she deserves to be treated with respect by the batterer). Another batterer, in an off hand way, physically demonstrated for me how he grabbed the survivor by the neck and flipped her on to the floor with one hand. These are not actions consistent with a survivor of domestic violence.

A batterer may respond to the question "What have you done to stop the violence?" by describing ways he controls her when she is "violent": "I try to keep her in the bedroom until I can get her calmed down," or "I make sure she can't leave the house because I am afraid of what she might do to herself." Many batterers will even admit to striking their partners but say they had "no choice" because she was hitting him.

◆ **Can you describe the first/last time that something like this happened?**

(Again, get specifics. If she/he is vague or changes the subject, ask the question again and get details.)

- ◆ **Have you ever been arrested for assaulting her/him? If so, what happened that time?**
- ◆ **What was your relationship like with your last partner? How/why did that relationship end?** Most batterers will tell you details about how terrible their former partners were, how their partners kept them from the kids, or unjustly had them for domestic violence.

3) Another clue that may be particularly useful is that the survivor will almost always take some responsibility for the abuse. She/he is likely to blame herself for the situation escalating, even if she/he says the batterer shouldn't have assaulted her/him. Survivors believe this for two reasons. First, the batterer (and sometimes their family and/or religious or cultural community) has told the survivor that the abuse is her/his fault and that if she/he tried harder the relationship would not have so many "problems." Secondly, most survivors want desperately to believe that they have some control over what is happening to them so that they do not feel powerless and so that they can hold on to the hope that if they continue to modify their behavior that they will be able to make their relationship better.

Survivors accept a great deal of responsibility for the abuse and often go to great lengths to defend the batterer. Batterers, on the other hand, want to portray themselves to be the "true victims" and will emphasize only their good qualities and all of their partner's bad qualities (real and fictitious). Batterers deliberately lie about and defame their partners. One way that batterers will try to distract you from discovering their true nature is that they will focus all of the discussion on other people and how other people (primarily the survivor), and outside forces, are causing all of the problems in his/her life/relationship. Batters will focus on how "bad" their partner is in terms of infidelity, promiscuity, drug use, neglect of kids, etc., or by talking about themselves (literally how smart or strong they are, what a good cook/basketball player/worker/singer/lover they are).

A survivor will almost always defend her partner by wanting you to understand that he is "not all bad." A survivor will often emphasize the batterer's good qualities-- good provider/worker/father/church member/etc. While a batterer will tell you "Not only do I think that she is sleeping around, she also takes prescription pills, she doesn't work

and she barely even keeps the house and kids clean—probably because she's so busy all day flirting with men and trying to get drugs." A survivor will tell you "I know he hits me when he is drinking, but he is a really nice person when he is sober." Survivors will go on to defend their partner; "I know he shouldn't treat me this way, but I could be more understanding of what a hard day he has had and, no matter what, he provides for us and is usually good with the kids."

This is probably the most confusing aspect of conducting an assessment. The batterer is going to paint a clearer picture for you in which the problems, and the person at fault, is solely their partner and they are the innocent victim. The survivor is going to paint a much more complicated picture in which she admits that her partner has problems but takes a lot of responsibility for the problems and makes a lot of excuses for her/his partner's behavior.

4) When meeting with the individual in person, be aware of the difference between offensive and defensive wounds: scratches on his/her face, back, or sides may have been received when he/she had her/him pinned down or in a strangle hold. Similarly, a bite mark on his forearm or bruising on his shins may indicate that he had his partner in a strangle hold and she was biting and kicking in an effort to get him to let go.

Scratching another person in the face is not a very smart or effective offensive attack. Therefore, it is unlikely that a person would initiate an assault in that way; it is more likely that the person would use scratching or biting as a defensive strategy.

Most importantly, keep in mind that batterers are trying to manipulate you and to "sell" themselves to you. You know who survivors are because you deal with them every day in your work. If you make a practice of conducting a thorough assessment with every person requesting services from your agency you will not be thrown off guard when you need to conduct an assessment with a male in a mixed gender relationship or with any person in a same-sex relationship. The assessment will be routine for you and you will be able to recognize when the responses you are receiving from an interviewee are not consistent with, or comparable to, the responses you routinely get from survivors.