"MY PROBLEM AND HOW I SOLVED IT":
Domestic Violence in Women’s Magazines

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Social scientists have generated a vast literature on domestic violence, a small part of which has entered the popular media and the consciousness of its consumers. As yet there has been little scholarly investigation of this popular body of knowledge on domestic violence. Using a qualitative analysis of popular women’s magazine articles and magazine writers’ guidebooks, I investigate the content, creation, and impact of this popular discourse. In this study, I demonstrate that the majority of articles in popular women’s magazines continue to portray the public issue of domestic violence as a private problem. Not only is it portrayed as a private problem but most often it is the victim’s problem. The dominant individual perspective that places responsibility on the victim normalizes the idea that victims should be held responsible for solving the problem. Finally, I demonstrate how the writing and editorial practices of these popular women’s magazines contribute to the dominance of assigning responsibility for domestic violence to individuals.

Since the 1970s there has been a dramatic change in the “representational resources” (Holstein and Miller 1993) available to the people who—in their roles as police officers, judges, attorneys, jurors, doctors, social workers, shelter workers, politicians, clergy, employers, friends, and family—make decisions regarding domestic violence. Today not only is there a domestic violence vocabulary and a host of social science theories (Lamb 1991; Kurz 1989; Loseke and Cahill 1984), but domestic violence is represented in talk shows, movies, and popular magazines. Social scientists have generated a vast literature on domestic violence, some of which has entered the popular media and the consciousness of its consumers. As yet there has been little scholarly investigation of this popular body of knowledge on domestic violence. Using a qualitative analysis of popular women’s magazine articles and magazine writers’ guidebooks, I investigate the content, creation, and impact of this popular discourse.

This article presents a qualitative analysis of one segment of the popular discourse, popular women’s magazines, which demonstrates the dominance of an individual perspective for establishing responsibility for domestic violence. Not only is it portrayed as a private problem but most often it is the victim’s problem. Most of the time these magazines locate the victims’ experiences within a discourse that ignores not only the role of the abuser but also of society. The article also demonstrates how the editorial practices of
these popular women's magazines contribute to the reproduction and legitimation of the individual perspective.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Until the late 1970s, the media used the term “domestic violence” to refer to riots and terrorism. However, with the rise of the battered women's movement, terms such as “battered women” and “battered woman syndrome” were coined and began appearing in the media (Tierney 1982). In the 1990s, citizens, scholars, and government officials have terms, facts, and perspectives with which to discuss the issue of domestic violence, formulate policy, and develop solutions. Each perspective includes, implicitly or explicitly, specific ideas about who is responsible for domestic violence and what, if anything, should be done in response to the violence. Previous studies of representations of violence against women have argued that particular constructions of the problem produce the need for a particular solution (Loseke 1992), that writing techniques used to describe the violence obscure the attribution of responsibility for the acts (Henley, Miller, and Beazley 1993; Lamb 1991), and that academic experts have constructed battered women as deviant (Loseke and Cahill 1984). Furthermore, theorists have argued that socially constructed categories such as “wife abuse” and “battered women” constitute specific ideas of who fits those categories and that individuals use these problem categories to understand and interpret social problems such as domestic violence (Holstein and Miller 1993; Loseke 1992).

Who is being held responsible for solving the problem of domestic violence? Basing my interpretive approach in critical theory, I investigate that question by analyzing the discourse used in women's magazines to construct domestic violence. Critical theory borrows from hermeneutical interpretation but includes a deliberate critique in its study (Giddens 1993). A critical theorist attempts to use research as a form of social or cultural criticism (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994). My research focuses on the attribution of responsibility for domestic violence in women's magazines. I critique this discourse for its overwhelming focus on the victims while it leaves the abusers in the background. Furthermore, this discourse fails to balance the need for prevention with the immediate needs of intervention.

The following are the women's magazines I use in this study along with the number of articles indicated in parentheses: Essence (15), Glamour (20), Good Housekeeping (15), Ladies' Home Journal (20), Mademoiselle (6), McCall's (13), Redbook (9), Seventeen (3), 'Teen (6), and Vogue (4). The Reader's Guide to Periodicals Index was used to locate all articles published in these magazines from 1970–1997 that had domestic violence as their main topic. I read all 111 articles on domestic violence in all of these magazines from this time period. There are 19 articles from 1970–1979, 36 articles from 1980–1989, and 56 articles from 1990–1997.

I chose these magazines based on four criteria: (1) the magazine was published throughout 1970–1997; (2) it reached a paid circulation level of 750,000 by 1985; (3) it is indexed in the Reader's Guide to Periodicals Index; and (4) it is a women's magazine. Women's magazines are magazines written for and about women. The magazines are usually self-described as “women's magazines” in market-related publications (e.g., Endres and Lueck 1995; Gage and Coppess 1994; Holm 1997). Also, the Writer's Digest Books publishers identify these magazines as “women's magazines” in their annual Writer's Market (e.g., Holm 1997). Women's magazines offer an interesting perspective on women's
issues, often introducing social problems and issues to women in more detail than do other mass media. Women's magazines also try to capture women's changing roles and responsibilities. By investigating popular women's magazines, we can start to see how women's issues are continuously constructed in popular discourse.

For this study, domestic violence is defined as physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse that occurs between two adults in an intimate relationship regardless of marital status or sexual orientation. However, all of the articles focused primarily on heterosexual relationships. Articles were not included if domestic violence was only incidental to the article or if they focused exclusively on child abuse. The second part of this article, the investigation of writing and editorial practices, draws upon advice books written primarily for freelance writers. I read advice books spanning from the 1940s to the late 1990s to explore changes over time.

**FRAMES OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Women's magazines solicit or advertise for articles that fall into one of several categories, such as true-life dramas, as-told-to, how-to, self-help, inspirational narratives and essays, personal experiences, profiles, surveys, or investigative reports (e.g., Fredette 1988; Wilson 1993). The focus of most of these articles is very clear. In fact, because authors are advised to use a narrow focus, many articles are often quite simplistic. Because of these limited perspectives, it is difficult to expose all aspects of a complex problem like domestic violence. Therefore, these articles tend to focus on "angles," such as the victim who overcomes abuse, how to leave an abusive husband, how police are failing victims, why doctors should do more for abuse victims, and why sports heroes abuse their wives. A few articles comprehensively cover domestic violence as a social problem. When reading these articles, I analyzed the focus of the article and how that focus assigned responsibility for solving the problem of domestic violence. The articles may place responsibility explicitly, by making claims about causes and solutions or, implicitly, by including some aspects about a case while excluding others.

I use four general frameworks to describe where responsibility is attributed for domestic violence. Those four frames are: (1) individuals, i.e., the victims and/or abusers involved, (2) institutions, such as the legal and medical systems, (3) cultural and structural factors, such as societal attitudes, gender role socialization, and the economy, and (4) an integrated analysis focusing on the interactions among individual, institutional, and cultural and structural factors. I use the term "frame of responsibility" to describe the way responsibility is assigned in these articles—adopting the term "frame" from Erving Goffman (1974). These four frames are summarized in Table 1.

Although common themes exist across frames, such as details of an abusive relationship or domestic violence victims' needs, I separate the articles by frames to distinguish where responsibility is being placed. The frame of responsibility impacts what solutions are suggested (e.g., women leaving the abusive relationship, tougher punishment for abusers). Therefore, even though there may be similarities in articles across the frames, the solutions that are called for—either explicitly or implicitly—point to who is being held responsible for stopping domestic violence. The following section describes each frame of responsibility in detail, including various themes within these frames.
### TABLE 1. FRAMES OF RESPONSIBILITY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Root of Problem</th>
<th>Catch Phrases</th>
<th>Primary Focus of Solutions</th>
<th>Policies/Solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individuals in abusive relationship:</td>
<td>“Why didn’t she leave?”</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Counseling for victims and/or batterers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>victim and/or batterer</td>
<td>Victim blaming</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ending the relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Battered woman syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Legal system: police, attorneys, courts, laws, judges</td>
<td>Failure of the system</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Domestic violence training for individuals in institutions, such as legal and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical system: doctors, nurses, hospitals, health care</td>
<td>Limits of the law</td>
<td></td>
<td>medical systems, churches, and schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational system: schools, media, advocate groups</td>
<td>“Why has the legal system failed to protect domestic violence victims?”</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Implementation of more policies and progressive laws</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural/Structural</td>
<td>Family structure</td>
<td>“Violence begets violence.”</td>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Change sexist character of family and society</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gender role socialization</td>
<td>“A marriage licence is a hitting license.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Public awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Violence in media</td>
<td>“Violence—as American as apple pie.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce violence in media</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sports culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce unemployment and poverty</td>
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<td>Unemployment, poverty</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Abolish corporal punishment and death penalty</td>
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<td>Sextist society</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Patriarchal dominance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Corporal punishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration/</td>
<td>Intergenerational Patterarchy and death penalty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Interrelatedness of social interactions</td>
<td>Police officer doesn’t take case seriously because it is a “family affair.”</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention</td>
<td>Combination of above solutions and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morals, politics, and law become merged.</td>
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Individual Frame of Responsibility

The individual frame of responsibility places responsibility for domestic violence on one or more individuals in the abusive relationship or on the relationship itself. This frame, found in nearly two out of three articles, commonly includes case histories of relationships and descriptions of individual actions. Solutions rooted in this frame remain on the individual level and are primarily focused on intervention, not prevention. The most common intervention programs suggested are various types of counseling and therapy. Another solution that this perspective focuses on is the woman leaving the relationship—and she is typically held responsible for taking all the necessary actions needed to leave.

Although all seventy-two articles in this frame are organized around individual responsibility, the articles vary on which individuals are held responsible for the causes and the solutions. Individuals who are held responsible include victims, batterers, and couples (both victim and batterer).2 Forty articles focus on victims of domestic violence, ten on battered women who kill their abusers, four on the batterers, and eighteen on “the couple.” In this section I discuss these four themes within the individual frame of responsibility.

The “Victim’s Problem”

The majority of articles using the individual frame place responsibility solely on the victim. Articles that focus primarily on the victims of domestic violence are either written by battered women or by an author who describes victims’ stories. When battered women write their own stories, they describe the history of their abusive relationship and what they did to get out of it. These battered women often say that they want to share their stories to encourage and inspire other women who are in abusive relationships. When a “third-party author” writes about victims of domestic violence, he or she generally discusses why women stay in abusive relationships.

Attributing responsibility solely to the victim is typified by the Good Housekeeping series “My Problem and How I Solved It,” in which an anonymous woman relates a case history of an abusive marriage and what she did to solve the problem.3 In the first “My Problem and How I Solved It” article, in 1972, a woman tells her story of being in an abusive marriage and what she did to put an end to that abuse. With the help of a counselor, she says that she understood better what she was doing to “challenge” her husband and how she could alleviate his pressure. At the end of the story, she tells how they are still together and working toward solving the problem. However, most “My Problem and How I Solved It” articles on domestic violence end with the victim telling how she left the abusive relationship. These types of articles have not changed much since 1972. In 1996, Good Housekeeping published a “My Problem and How I Solved It” article focusing on how one woman escaped a marriage riddled with emotional abuse. Though the type of abuse discussed differs, the message remains the same: women are responsible for ending the abuse.

Other articles written by former battered women often try to explain why they stayed in the relationship for so long. Furthermore, there are many articles written by freelance authors who explain why victims stay in abusive relationships.

The obvious question in the face of such a roller coaster of emotional manipulation is why doesn’t the woman just leave? Yet leaving is often the last thing she will con-
sider. Or, if she does, she will again fall for her abuser’s charm, believe his promises and apologies and end up right back where she was. (Feeney 1989, *Mademoiselle*, p. 268)

Women often stay in an abusive situation because they feel helpless, cut off from family and friends, financially dependent, or told that they are worthless or partly to blame for the abuse. A woman may also stay out of a very real fear that the batterer will make good on his threats to kill her, or the children, if she leaves. (“When A Woman Needs A Way Out” 1990, *Good Housekeeping*, p. 249)

The question of why women stay in abusive relationships is often answered with reference to psychological theories, such as Lenore Walker’s (1984; 1989) cycle of violence. The counselor’s voice is usually present in these articles. Counselors are either quoted or referred to by the victim, who relates their advice. Counseling often plays a key role in the victim’s case history. Psychological understandings of domestic violence are also present in these articles in descriptions of their use in court cases.

Articles that focus primarily on the victims tend to be about women who eventually left the abusive relationship. When writing for magazines, battered women often discuss what finally made them leave. Other authors give advice on how to leave and encourage victims to take control of their lives and get out.

A woman involved in a violent courtship *can* break that cycle and change her life, if something happens to make her want to. She may be so badly beaten that she fears she will die. Or she may simply wake up one morning and decide that she’s had enough. (Baker 1983, *Glamour*, p. 367)

Making a decision to leave your home and a life of abuse will be difficult. Your husband may even try to stop you, but you must take action now! Abused wives must come out of the closet and put an end to this terrible practice. (Webb 1987, *Essence*, p. 14)

“Don’t be a victim,” Dr. Briggs said. I knew he was talking to me. “If you don’t like your life, fix it. Don’t feel sorry for yourself. It will destroy you. If you want to be happy, accept responsibility for your own lives.” (Kays 1997, *Redbook*, p. 78)

Battered women often lament that they could have gotten out sooner if they had seen the “warning signs” or if they had just realized what was going on.

“A lot of my anger now is directed toward myself,” she told me recently. “I’m mad at *me*. I didn’t have to stick around and be abused all those years!” (Rock 1983, *McCall’s*, p. 58)

Physical abuse rarely comes as a surprise. It’s usually preceded by verbal abuse—harsh words, name-calling. Then comes a push, a shove, a slap. There are always signs, and we must be discerning enough to assess whether someone deserves to have a front-row seat in our life. (Taylor 1994, *Essence*, p. 65)

I’m not bitter. I don’t blame Jake for everything that happened in our relationship. I hold myself responsible for my own actions and choices. Forgiving myself has been the hardest part. (“Boyfriend Abuse” 1995, *Teen*, p. 53)

In these articles, the women say they are telling their stories to encourage other victims of domestic violence to get help. In many cases, they plead with women to end the abuse.
That’s why I decided to write about my experience... in the hope that other women who may be secretly suffering as I did will be helped by knowing that they are not alone. There is something that can be done about ending marital violence. (“Our Home” 1972, Good Housekeeping, p. 86)

Show yourself some respect by seeking the help that you need to end the abuse. Don’t forget: The power to change things is within you! (Woodward 1990, ‘Teen, p. 92)

In the 1990s, some articles began appearing that described “what they’re doing now.” These articles describe the lives of women several years after they got out of abusive relationships. In 1993, Ladies’ Home Journal wrote about Hedda Nussbaum six years after her trial. Good Housekeeping followed this example in 1997 with a feature article on how Hedda is doing now. In 1996, Good Housekeeping ran “From Battered Wife to Top Cop,” a story about a woman who escaped from an abusive marriage and eventually struggled to become a police chief in a Chicago suburb. Osantowski, the woman in the story, encourages other women to get out of any situation they are not happy with, as in the following quote:

“People say you have to play the hand that’s dealt you, but I don’t believe that for a minute,” Osantowski declares. “I say, if you don’t like the hand, reshuffle the deck.” (Rubin 1996, Good Housekeeping, p. 20)

One reason for these “life after abuse” stories is to offer hope to women in abusive relationships. The stories encourage other women to take similar actions to end the abuse and choose a new life.

The majority of articles that use an individual frame of responsibility focus primarily on the victim. A prevalent question in these articles is “Why do battered women remain in the abusive relationship?” In these articles, the victim may not always be blamed explicitly for the violence or for staying in the relationship. Indeed, many articles focus on the victim in a sympathetic manner, such as by giving her credit for leaving the abusive relationship, changing her behavior, or seeking counseling. However, the focus—and thus the responsibility—remains on the victim rather than the batterer. Explanations for why women stay in abusive relationships often mention institutional and social barriers; however, these perspectives still place responsibility on the individual rather than on society or specific institutions. There is no advice on how society can change to help the victim. Rather, the victim must overcome these obstacles.

Although all the magazines had at least one article that focused on the victims on an individual level, Good Housekeeping led the way with eleven articles and all of ‘Teen’s six articles on abuse focused on the victim on an individual level. The articles that focus on the victims of domestic violence vary little over the past three decades except that the number of articles appearing with this focus has increased: 6 in the 1970s, 10 in the 1980s, and 24 in the 1990s. One of the new themes to appear in the 1990s focuses on the lives of battered women years after they escaped their abusive relationships.

Battered Women Who Kill Their Abusers

In an interesting twist on victim accountability, some of the articles focus on victims of abuse who kill their abuser. The “killer” in the situation is still identified as the victim. In 1980, Glamour published an editorial describing how the legal system fails battered
women who kill their abusers. However, the first articles using an individual frame that focus on battered women who kill their abusers appeared in 1984, when two articles were published in Good Housekeeping and two in Redbook. The articles gave detailed descriptions of the abusive relationship, the murders, and the trials. None of the women in these articles served any prison time for the murders. Three of those articles were excerpts from the books Shattered Night and The Burning Bed, which both describe famous cases of battered women who killed their abusers. In 1984, The Burning Bed was turned into a popular made-for-TV movie starring Farrah Fawcett.

In 1991, articles began to include a discussion of whether or not these killers should go free or not be convicted in the first place. This controversy is illustrated in a Glamour article that reported the response to a survey on the question: “Could you imagine killing an abusive mate?” The following statements were responses to that survey.

“If there is sufficient evidence of abuse, and the situation was at the point of kill or be killed, and the victim escaped by killing, then good for her. Let her have her life and her dignity back.”

“Why can’t abused women turn to family, friends, clergy or one of the shelters provided for them? There are always other means of escape.”

“Men do not deserve to lose their lives because they have a problem. Both partners can seek help before it comes to murder.” (“This Is What” 1991, Glamour, p. 193)

This theme is also illustrated in an introduction to the Ladies’ Home Journal article “Killer or Victim?”

For years, Joyce Steiner endured horrendous abuse—and then she killed her husband. She spent almost a year in jail before her sentence was commuted. Did she deserve to go free? (Branan 1991, p. 128)

This article, which is clearly sympathetic to the battered woman, also discussed her life after she was released from prison. Glamour’s 1994 “Battered Women Who Kill” and Good Housekeeping’s 1995 “Life after Death” articles continue this theme by describing the lives of battered women after their prison terms.

In these articles, each author describes in detail the abuse that led to the murder and often explains how this abuse may cause a woman to suffer from what Lenore Walker describes as the “battered woman syndrome.” In a Glamour article, Brenda Aris (1994, p. 160) writes about the abuse that eventually led her to murder her husband:

In the year before the shooting, my life had deteriorated into a nightmare of pain, fear and helplessness. By now I was 27 years old and suffered from the typical symptoms for what psychologist Lenore Walker, Ph.D., an expert on domestic violence, named battered woman syndrome (BWS): I believed I was worthless and that my husband was all-powerful, that my life depended on my ability to placate him.

The individual frame of responsibility is still maintained because the discussion rests on how the “victim” felt she had no other option but to kill her abuser. In these articles, there is no responsibility placed on institutions or society in general to stop these murders. The focus often goes back to “Why didn’t she leave?”
In answer to the inevitable question—"Why didn't you just leave?"—Joyce says she did, in fact, try. Several times. But like many battered women, she was more frightened of leaving than of staying. (Branan 1991, Ladies' Home Journal, p. 198)

One of the most recent articles on battered women who kill, Mademoiselle's 1995 "Murder Next Door," focused on what neighbors could have done to help the abused woman. However, in the end the neighbor concluded that it was still up to the victim to get out.

To see what I could have done differently, I called a local battered women’s program and several national organizations on domestic violence. The consensus: Ultimately, it had to be Laurie's decision to leave Bruce. (Lockwood 1995, p. 198)

In most of these articles, the author argues that judges need to allow the battered woman syndrome into court so that jurors can understand what the women went through. However, this perspective still focuses on individual rather than institutional responsibility because there is no suggestion on how institutions can stop the murder or abuse. Instead, institutions are encouraged to accept what is portrayed as an unfortunate but at times inevitable individual solution of murder.

The "Batterer's Problem"

Only four articles in the individual frame focused primarily on the batterer. However, three of those articles focused on “warning signs” that women should be looking for in order to avoid abusive relationships. These three articles—Glamour’s “How to Recognize a Potential Battering” (Benedict 1986) and Essence’s “How to Spot an Abusive Man” (McCourtie 1990) and “Check Him Out” (Murphy-Milano 1997)—list characteristics that are common in batters, such as excessive jealousy, verbal abusiveness, controlling behavior, and inability to control anger. The articles focus on how the “potential victims” have the responsibility for avoiding these men rather than focusing on how these “potential batters” should seek help and change their behaviors. Therefore, even though these articles discuss the behavior of abusers, the responsibility is still being placed on the victims—or potential victims.

Only one article in the individual frame places responsibility solely on the batterer rather than on the victim or even on the couple combined. In the 1994 Glamour article “How I Realized I Was Dangerous,” batters around the country were asked how and why they decided to get counseling. Excerpts from the batters’ letters appeared in the short article, for example:

The turning point for me was when I woke up one morning after we were fighting and my hand was sore from hitting her. And I thought, “Man, if my hand is sore, just imagine her face, her body, how she must feel.” Now I watch all this stuff on TV about O. J. Simpson, and I think, man, that could have been me. That rage, that rage is something else. (Weinstock 1994, p. 91)

Essence and Glamour are the only magazines to have any articles that focused on the batterer. The only article to hold the batterer as the main person responsible appeared in Glamour.
The “Couple’s Problem”

Usually when the batterer is discussed it is in the context of the “couple.” Articles in this category analyze the relationship from the viewpoints of both the batterer and the victim—and assign responsibility to both parties. Eighteen articles fit this description; eleven of those are from the *Ladies’ Home Journal.*

Just as “My Problem and How I Solved It” epitomizes individual accountability, couple accountability is typified by the *Ladies’ Home Journal* series “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” which was introduced in 1953. Articles in this series consist of three sections. First, the wife explains her side of the story. Then the husband provides his perspective. Finally, the couple’s counselor explains what caused the abuse and how the couple was able to end the abuse and build a healthy marriage, as in this example:

Though Joel resisted my suggestions initially, insisting there was nothing about him that needed changing, after a few sessions, he began to see how chauvinistic he was. “I love you, Ellen,” he said during one session, “and I’m sorry I’ve been so bullheaded.” Just hearing her husband admit this gave Ellen the encouragement she needed to work on her own problems. The first point we had to focus on was Ellen’s incessant talking. Furthermore, Ellen was totally unaware that many of her actions clearly provoked her husband. Her shopping, for instance, was excessive. And she was often late for important appointments because she had so little confidence in her ability to choose an appropriate outfit. (Werner 1986, p. 18)

The articles in this series assigned blame to both the husband’s violence and the wife’s behavior that “provoked” him. Articles in this series that focused on abuse were published in 1979, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1989, and 1996. In all seven “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” articles that discuss domestic violence, the answer is yes—the marriage can be and is saved, at least for the present. At the end of each of these articles, the couple stays together because of the successful counseling they receive.

In 1994, there was a feature article discussing this series as it relates to domestic violence. Margery D. Rosen, editor of the “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” series since 1983, says that the premise for the series is that “many couples can solve their problems if they are willing to face tough issues, and have the right therapist to guide them” (Rosen 1994). However, Rosen reports that “experts” are split on the question of whether marriage counseling can be effective in abusive situations. All the “experts” in the article were psychologists or psychiatrists. The controversy is over marriage counseling versus individual counseling (batterer counseling and victim counseling). Obviously, the attribution of responsibility never leaves the individual level. Rosen herself wrote the 1996 article that follows the earlier formula of telling how a couple saved their abusive marriage through counseling.

In the 1980s, *Seventeen, Vogue, McCall’s* and *Redbook* published domestic violence articles that focused on both victims and abusers. The articles discussed why victims stay in abusive relationships and why abusers abuse. In some articles, such as *Vogue’s* “Love and Rage,” the victim is held responsible for provoking the abuse:

While we resist the popular notion that wives are “asking for it”—first, because hurt women deserve sympathy, not condemnation; and second, if we were masochists, there’d be no problem—we do have to examine the ways in which women may, unwittingly, up the ante in a fight. Studies confirm what husbands have claimed all along: wives *provoke.* (Cunningham 1982, p. 62)
Articles that focus on “the couple” decreased during the 1990s. Ladies’ Home Journal continued to publish the “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” articles, and Glamour published an article in 1997 on dating violence that covered both victims’ and abusers’ views on abusive relationships. In Glamour’s article on dating violence, the victims are advised to get out of the relationship—unlike the Ladies’ Home Journal articles that end their stories with the couple staying together because of counseling.

The articles that use the individual frame of responsibility may refer to institutional factors such as the police or shelters. However, these references are in the context of individuals learning about and using these resources, not on the communities or organizations providing them. Responsibility remains with the individual rather than institutions that might intervene in the abuse. This differentiates these articles from those that have an institutional frame of responsibility. The individual frame of responsibility may also make use of cultural factors, such as childhood experiences, in describing an individual. However, cultural factors are only used as parts of case histories and are not critically analyzed as they are in articles that use the cultural frame of responsibility.

The most common solution given in these articles is counseling. In some articles such as the “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” series, the solution is marriage counseling. In other articles, the victim is encouraged to leave the relationship and to seek counseling for herself. In only one article is all the responsibility placed on the batterer to end the abuse or to never start it. Most of these articles focus on ending the abuse rather than working toward preventing it. The overwhelming majority of these articles place the responsibility for ending the abuse on the victim, who is most often a woman.

**Institutional Frame of Responsibility**

One in five of all the examined articles placed responsibility on institutions. The institutional frame of responsibility locates the causes and solutions for domestic violence within institutions, such as the legal, medical, and religious domains. These institutions are called upon to intervene in domestic violence situations. As in the individual frame, the primary focus of solutions in the institutional frame is intervention, including domestic violence training for individuals in institutions and the implementation of progressive policies regarding domestic violence, such as mandatory arrest and victimless prosecution.

McCall’s, which published five articles with an institutional frame in the 1970s, is the only magazine to use this frame during that decade. However, McCall’s has not published an institutionally framed article since. In the 1980s and 1990s, eighteen more articles appeared in these magazines—half of them in Glamour.

The most commonly mentioned institutions are in the legal system—the topic of sixteen of the twenty-three articles. These articles emphasize the failure of the police and courts, or they promote the implementation of new programs. Some articles focus on the behavior of judges who fail to enforce protection orders or to intervene in family disputes. Others criticize police for their lack of training in domestic violence and their failure to take domestic disputes seriously. Other themes include more aggressive stalking laws, mandatory arrest policies, improved police training, education of lawyers and judges, victim advocacy policies, mandatory counseling for abusers and more aggressive prosecution policies, including those that permit prosecution of batterers without the victim having to press charges.
McCall’s first article, in 1975, called for the legal system to step up its protection of domestic violence victims (Levin 1975). In McCall’s “A Community to the Rescue” (Pascoe 1977), a number of institutions in one community are applauded for getting involved in helping victims of domestic violence.

Gradually the Philadelphia area began to get behind its battered women. Another television station did a half-hour documentary on the subject, and several newspapers in surrounding communities researched and reported on the problem locally. Station KYW-TV put together a resource booklet called Domestic Abuse: Facts that listed the agencies in its broadcast area that could help battered women. The booklet went to hospitals, lawyers, women’s groups and anyone who might come into contact with an abused wife. (Pascoe 1977, p. 81)

In 1978, McCall’s reported on the “discovery” that domestic violence was also a problem in the suburbs. This article focused on the suburban shelters and community groups that worked to counter domestic violence in the suburbs.

In 1980, a Glamour editorial argued that battered women who had killed their abusers did so because they had no other alternatives: “The appalling fact remains that these women were pushed over the edge of endurance by the unresponsiveness and inadequacy of our justice and social service systems” (“Scarred Lives” 1980, p. 56). The editorial called for better laws to protect victims of abuse and to punish abusers: “More states must enact laws that give the police greater power to arrest batterers, that enable the courts to evict batterers from their homes, and that make spouse abuse a separate criminal offense in order to encourage prosecution.” Glamour continued to call for tougher actions against abusers in its 1986 article on arresting abusers as an “effective cure for domestic violence” (“Scarred Lives” 1980, p. 56).

In 1989, Redbook published a special report on how the legal system fails to protect victims of domestic violence. Until then, all of the articles using this frame were fairly short columns. In 1990, Ladies’ Home Journal and Essence followed this example and published feature articles arguing that the legal system was failing to protect victims. These articles were the first to use detailed cases to illustrate the failure of the legal system. An example of such failure is illustrated in Ladies’ Home Journal’s “No Way Out” (Chittum, Bauman, and Nyborg-Andersen 1990, p. 126), which claims that, “Each year, hundreds of women are killed by ex-husbands or boyfriends who stalk them obsessively, undeterred by police or court orders,” and asks, “Why has our legal system failed to protect them?” The article includes the following example:

Though she’d obtained a restraining order barring him from contacting her or their four-year-old daughter, Brandi, the harassment continued, making her life a living hell . . . he had allegedly chased her on an interstate highway at 100 mph, waving a gun out of his car window. Again, Dawn pressed charges. And once again, pending a trial, Randall was released. On the day before Dawn was to testify against her husband in court, she found a bullet lodged in her computer at work; someone had fired through the window opposite her desk. Badly shaken, Dawn broke down at the hearing, and the judge dropped the charge on grounds of insufficient evidence. The roses arrived the following week. Four days later, prosecutors say, Randall Jolly shot Dawn four times as she sat in her car outside Brandi’s day-care center. (Chittum et al. 1990, p. 126)

Holding doctors accountable for helping domestic violence victims didn’t happen until
1992 with *Glamour*’s “Why Doctors Won’t Help Battered Women” (Neimark 1992). Only one other article focused on the medical community. *Redbook*’s “A Cry for Help” (Stucker 1994) was a “life after abuse” article that featured a former battered woman turned doctor who helps abused women. This article differs from the other “what they’re doing now” articles in the individual frame because this author criticizes the medical community for not doing enough to help. She uses her own story to illustrate the failure of the medical community and calls for institutional change.

The Lorena and John Bobbitt and O. J. and Nicole Brown Simpson cases inspired many articles that began to appear in 1994. Thanks to those cases, marital rape and abusers getting custody of children received more attention in articles. A new theme—for any of the frames—appeared in *Good Housekeeping*’s 1997 article “No Place to Hide.” George Lardner Jr. tells about his daughter being murdered by her abusive ex-boyfriend. Lardner argues that, had the legal system done its job, his daughter would still be alive. This is *Good Housekeeping*’s first article to use a perspective other than the individual frame.

Although the articles change over time in terms of keeping up to date with new laws and bills, some of the same themes and frustrations with the system appear from 1975–1997. In a 1975 *McCall*’s article, frustrations with unenforced court injunctions mirror the frustrations of the 1997 *Good Housekeeping* article about the ineffectiveness of orders of protection. Regardless of the particular institutions discussed, all of the articles that use the institutional frame propose solutions that focus on intervention. As with the individual frame, these solutions are primarily concerned with dealing with abuse after it has started. The authors argue that either the system failed to intervene and protect victims of domestic violence or that more laws and training are needed for more effective intervention. Few articles gave sole attention to tougher punishment for the batterer or even getting help for the batterer. Most of the articles focused entirely or in part on the immediate needs of the victim. This, of course, is crucial. However, the system’s failure to arrest, punish, counsel, prevent, or condemn abusers remains largely ignored. Furthermore, women’s magazines do not discuss or demand that institutions—such as the legal, medical, religious, educational, and social service systems—work toward preventing abuse.

**Cultural/Structural Frame of Responsibility**

Only eight articles used the cultural/structural frame of responsibility, which focuses on cultural and structural factors that at first may not seem directly related to domestic violence. Unlike the institutional frame, which focuses on intervention, this frame focuses primarily on prevention. Such factors as social attitudes, sexism, socialization, violence in the media, societal tolerance of violence, poverty, and family structure all help to foster an environment that may encourage or at least tolerate violence. This frame includes sociological and feminist ideas that place domestic violence in an explanatory framework that includes the impact of social structures on individuals’ behavior. Unlike the individual and institutional frames, the cultural/structural frame proposes solutions based in prevention. These solutions include changing the sexist character of family and society, reducing violence in the media, reducing unemployment and poverty, and abolishing corporal and capital punishment.

In 1980 *McCall*’s published a short article on Murray Straus and Richard Gelles’s research on family violence. The article includes a discussion of child abuse, sibling
abuse, wife abuse, and husband abuse. One of the main discoveries reported is that violence begets violence. In McCall’s “Violence: All in the Family,” corporal punishment is linked to spouse abuse.

[The experts] found that those adults who, as teenagers, were frequently punished physically have a spouse-beating rate four times greater than that of adults whose parents did not strike or beat them. Say the authors: “Violence, like charity, begins at home.” (Morgenstern 1980, p. 49)

Eight years passed before another article using a cultural/structural frame of responsibility appeared in one of these women’s magazines. In 1988, Glamour published an editorial about how most people ignore the abuse they see going on in other families.

Most of us can easily identify with the neighbor who hears screams next door but doesn’t want to get involved; or with the teacher who repeatedly sees bruises on a child’s face but fears adverse professional consequences if she confronts the parents; or with the relative who sees a family member being victimized but remains silent rather than break familial ranks. (“I Just Didn’t Think” 1988, p. 82)

After the highly publicized case of Lorena and John Bobbitt in June 1993, the Ladies’ Home Journal published an article on attitudes about marriage and marital rape in their November issue. The focus of the article is that society needs to change its attitudes about marriage—starting with what we teach our children.

We [need to] raise our children to have higher self-esteem so that girls would not fall into relationships with boys who manhandled them, and boys would [know] they did not have to beat a woman up or rape her to prove their manhood. (Gross 1993, p. 172)


When I was hit by my longtime Black male companion, who was a quiet, mild-mannered academic guy, friends, family and strangers alike were all quick to ask: “What did you do?” Clearly, in their minds, any time a woman is attacked by her mate, either verbally or physically, there must be something she has done to provoke or incite him. We are to blame. It is this type of sexist and misogynistic thinking that has made violence against females acceptable in our communities. There has long been an attitude that backhand licks from our husbands or lovers to “keep her in line,” “to show who’s boss” or just “to let her know her place” are not only acceptable but deserved.

Another theme in the cultural frame of responsibility is the “sports culture.” In the midst of the media blitz regarding the O. J. Simpson case, Redbook featured an article on athletes and wife abuse. In “Why Sports Heroes Abuse Their Wives,” Joan Ryan reports cases of prominent athletes involved in domestic violence and the connection between their professional and private behaviors. She also points out that the sports culture makes it easier for abusers to “get away with abuse” because of their celebrity status.
After Robin Givens went to court in 1989 to divorce heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, who she claims assaulted her on several occasions, the judge invited Tyson into his chambers to pose with him and his mother for a picture. (Ryan 1995, p. 131)

In 1996, *Essence* published an article written from a male point of view that focuses on the masculine culture and domestic violence.

That Daddy would ever abuse Mama still seems incomprehensible to me. But masculinity in our community has always been synonymous with male domination of women. (Campbell 1996, p. 48)

Five of the eight articles that use a cultural/structural frame of responsibility appeared in the 1990s—most of those after the Bobbitt and Simpson cases. *McCall’s, Glamour, Vogue, Ladies’ Home Journal, and Redbook* all had one token article on cultural or structural factors related to domestic violence. *Essence* is the only magazine to have multiple articles in this frame of responsibility. All but one of these articles were short columns or editorials. Only *Redbook* published a long feature article on a cultural aspect of domestic violence. That particular article, on athletes and wife abuse, appeared in 1995 and appears to have been inspired by the O. J. Simpson case.

In contrast to institutions that are called upon for intervention, the cultural/structural frame focuses on preventing domestic violence. Most of the articles in the cultural/structural frame explain how domestic violence is tolerated or encouraged because of a particular cultural or structural factor. The solution lies in changing or eradicating those factors even though the efficacy of the solutions might not be realized immediately.

### Integrational Frame of Responsibility

Only eight articles used the integrational frame of responsibility, which focuses on the interaction of the individual, institutional, cultural, and structural sources of responsibility. It provides a more complex analysis of domestic violence. This frame shows how individuals, institutions, and culture are all interrelated and thus all responsible for domestic violence. This frame incorporates both intervention and prevention—something the other frames fail to do. The integrational frame calls for preventive solutions that coexist with intrapersonal and institutional responses yet have the potential to reduce the need for these interventions. Its advocates want both to transform the parts of society that teach and foster acts of domestic violence and to respond to the immediate needs of victims. While the other frames have a narrower focus, the integrational frame is more comprehensive because it integrates the many factors involved with domestic violence.

In 1976 both *Mademoiselle* and *McCall’s* published short, but rather comprehensive, articles that incorporate the many complicated factors causing domestic violence and impeding solutions. The interaction of law and cultural attitudes is illustrated in *Mademoiselle*’s article.

In her book, Del Martin points out that less than a hundred years ago, there were laws on the books defining the degree to which a husband might legitimately chastise—i.e. beat—his wife. The laws have been struck down, but the mentality that produced them, and the power structure that enforced them, remain largely unchanged. (Durbin 1976, p. 66)
The *McCall's* article also pointed out the many problems that battered women face when trying to escape abuse.

Shelter for the victims is not enough. At La Casa de Las Madres in San Francisco, for example, each victim is assigned a staff member who sits down with her and finds out what she needs—welfare check, medical care, job training, legal assistance in pressing charges or getting a divorce, low-cost housing, marriage counseling. (Pascoe 1976, p. 51)

In 1977, *Glamour* ran a short article outlining the various actions society needed to take to fight domestic violence. Such actions include shelters, formal training of police, destigmatization of battered women, legislation, and public awareness. In 1979, *Essence* ran an article illustrating the interaction between individual beliefs and police practices.

It is also important to note that the large majority of police officers are men and are subject to the same attitudes about wife abuse that affect the general public. If these attitudes are carried over into their work, police officers responding to domestic disturbance calls are likely to consider such problems private family matters and wasteful of their time. (Breiter 1979, p. 126)

In 1987, *McCall's* published an article on domestic violence similar to its 1976 one that discusses the multiple problems that are interrelated in our society.

The multiple problems confronting the wife-mother en route to freedom: She has to go on relief or find a job, locate affordable housing and appropriate child care, almost insurmountable obstacles for those already worn out by bouts of violence. Meanwhile, her family, friends and clergyman may be appealing to her not to break up her home. (Eckman 1987, p. 159)

Other articles that use the integrational frame of responsibility make a connection between cultural stereotypes and medical institutions. In “Why She Shot Him,” Michael D’Antonio (1991, p. 172) reports that after Veronica, a battered woman, told a doctor who was examining her that her husband had attacked her, “he laughed and told me that he hoped that I gave him a good one, too.” This article also illustrates the common themes in the integrational frame, including how the attitudes of jurors, attorneys, police, and judges affect the legal system and how cultural myths and stereotypes of domestic violence inhibit social support.

In 1997, *Essence* ran an article focused on young black women who were being abused. The article covers the many problems that complicate this social problem and ends on a note that rarely shows up in women’s magazine articles—a plea to change the climate that accepts abuse rather than look to women to stop the problem: “Many experts say we must stop looking to the abused woman to solve the problem of violent relationships and begin to change the climate that accepts abuse” (Amber 1997, p. 104).

The articles in the integrational frame often explain how individuals are affected by cultural attitudes and stereotypes that affect decision making and social support as related to domestic violence. The solutions in this frame are complex, incorporating the needs for intervention and prevention. Many of the articles emphasize how we need the criminal justice system to enforce laws against batterers, shelters to house victims, employers to pro-
vide adequate training and pay, families to offer support, schools to teach conflict resolution tactics, and individuals to change their attitudes toward domestic violence. *McCall’s, Mademoiselle, Essence,* and *Glamour* are the only magazines that have published articles on domestic violence that use an integrational frame of responsibility. *Good Housekeeping, ’Teen,* and *Seventeen* have not published articles in either the integrational or the cultural/structural frames of responsibility.

The use of the integrational frame of responsibility for portraying domestic violence in women’s magazines is decreasing with time. The integrational frame was used in 7% of the total articles. Half of those articles were published in the 1970s. The integrational frame represented 21% of the total articles in the 1970s, but in the 1990s the integrational frame has represented only 3.5% of the articles. One reason for this may be that the “discovery” of domestic violence took place in the 1970s. The problem of domestic violence was “new” during this time. The women’s movement pushed this problem into the spotlight. Because it was considered “new,” writing an article that described the broad scope and complex issues related to domestic violence was acceptable. However, today’s writers are encouraged to focus on a particular, even narrow, angle. A hazard of research is “wasting time getting too much information on all facets of your topic so that you lose focus and can’t zero-in on your particular angle” (Gage and Coppess 1994:76). So once domestic violence became a “known issue,” magazine editors may have discouraged comprehensive articles on the topic.

**REPRODUCING AND LEGITIMATING THE INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE**

Why is the individual frame of responsibility dominant in women’s popular magazines? One possible explanation is that psychological theories of domestic violence are dominant in academia and thus influence the dominant individual perspective in popular discourse. However, this is implausible given the significant body of sociological and feminist theories on domestic violence that goes beyond the individual level of analysis. These magazine articles even cite experts from multiple perspectives but still use the individual frame. Why then are these theories not represented more in the magazine articles?

Another possible explanation for the domination of the individual frame is the U. S. individualistic culture (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985; Ehrenreich and English 1978; Simonds 1992), represented by the emergence of a “pop psychology” that helped set guidelines for the new woman of the sixties and seventies. This pop psychology became “the mass ideology of the consumer society, the lore of the adman and the Market researcher, condensed into easy-to-read guidelines for daily living” (Ehrenreich and English 1978, p. 297). The pop psychology movement was invigorating for millions of women who could read about these new life guidelines in therapy groups, self-help books, and magazine articles. Along with this new marketplace psychology came an increased demand for “psychological counseling.” Though this demand increased the growth industry of psychologists, pop psychology was never contained by any academic discipline. People of all backgrounds could get in on the mass production of self-help books that started in the 1970s (Ehrenreich and English 1978; Simonds 1992).

Although these magazines are located within this individualistic culture, this explanation alone tells us nothing about the mechanism by which these cultural attitudes become embodied in magazine articles. To understand the mechanism by which this individualistic perspective is reproduced and legitimated, I examined the writing and editorial practices
of these popular women’s magazines as expressed in writers’ guidebooks. These guidebooks are written primarily for freelance writers, who author the majority of articles in women’s magazines. The percentage of freelance-written articles ranges from 40–95 percent with most of the magazines averaging over 80 percent (Holm 1997; Deimling 1984). In order to get published, freelancers must write articles that meet editors’ expectations, which are described in these guidebooks. The following section demonstrates how the writing and editorial practices described in these guidebooks contribute to the dominance of the individual frame.

Doing Research and Using Experts

Two topics of particular importance in these guidebooks are their instructions for doing research and their guidelines for using experts. Although doing research and using experts are emphasized in the guidebooks from each decade, how to do research and how to use the experts has changed.

In the 1940s and 1950s, guidebooks emphasized conducting thorough, in-depth research on a topic. Learning as much as possible on the subject is clearly emphasized. It is important to become an expert on the subject by learning from the authorities in that field (Brenecke 1942; Campbell 1944; Neal 1949). In the 1960s and 1970s, a transition occurs to doing minimal, “economic” research to save time. Some advice books from the 1970s till the present are particularly blunt about not doing much research. “Unless you’ve discovered a way to eat bylines, it doesn’t make much sense to spend 40 hours researching and ten hours writing an article for which you’ll be paid only $40, So, how much research should you do? The answer is: As little as possible!” (Kelley 1978, p. 41). The trend to do minimal research became dominant in the guidebooks for the 1980s and 1990s. Jay Stuller (1988, p. 34) warns writers that collecting too much research can complicate your writing: “Taking on a complex subject about which you know relatively little is one of the largest psychological hurdles—as well as a practical problem—for beginning writers.”

The shift from in-depth research to economical research also affects how authors are advised to use experts. “Experts” in academia continually legitimate representations of problem categories. The implications of this are discussed in Michel Foucault’s (1979) study of criminals, Aaron Cicourel’s (1968) study of juvenile delinquency, and Donileen Loseke and Spencer Cahill’s (1984) study of battered women. Loseke and Cahill (1984, p. 296) use the term “expert” to describe those self-identified individuals who “believe that their understandings should be used to educate and assist those who are less knowledgeable and fortunate.” These individuals claim their expertise based on intellectual study, practical experience in social services, or both. These experts include academics, social service providers, political activists, and journalists. What the “experts” say in these magazine articles is presented as fact. As Kathryn Keller (1994, p. 157) argues, we need to be cautious of experts who “use their titles as social scientists or professionals, as possessors of superior knowledge, to declare opinions as fact.” Furthermore, we should be concerned with how journalists use experts to legitimate their stories.

In the 1940s and 1950s, authors of advice books on writing for magazines emphasize using experts to learn about the topic you are writing on. Writers are encouraged to soak up the expert’s information. Helen Patterson (1939) tells writers not to talk too much doing an interview so that the expert has time to give his opinions. Authors are also
encouraged to speak to many authorities to “become an expert” so that you can check authorities against each other (Patterson 1939; Brennecke 1942; Campbell 1944). During the 1960s and 1970s, there is a shift in how to use experts. Even though experts are still used as sources of information, authors begin to take on more ownership of the article (Weisbord 1965, p. 115). Authors are told to gain information from experts, but less emphasis is placed on learning all they can. Authors are advised to gather enough information to support their themes. Here we see the shift from learning about the topic from the expert to gathering information to support or legitimate a predetermined theme (Bird 1967).

In the 1980s, guidebooks begin to be even more explicit about using experts for legitimating stories. Editors strongly encourage the use of experts. “Your articles need the support of expert opinion, quotes, moving anecdotes, etc. These are important because they substantiate your ideas” (Shimberg 1988, p. 176, emphasis added). In Get Published: 100 Top Magazine Editors Tell You How (Gage and Coppess 1994), an entire chapter is dedicated to finding and interviewing experts. Diane Gage and Marcia Coppess (1994, p. 72) view experts more as a tool for legitimating an article than as a source of information that might change the article’s focus: “The role of an expert is to give the article credibility and to tell the audience the most important points.” Writers should know before the interview “what you want your subject to tell you, or the direction in which you want the questions to lead” (ibid.). Writers should not get trapped in a long-winded interview. “Remember, he or she may be the expert on the topic, but you’re the writer and the one who decides what to include in the article” (ibid.). The most important part of interviewing experts is “getting good quotes.” Gage and Coppess note that some writers call their interview sources to review their quotes. But Gage and Coppess (1994, p. 77) tell writers not to send their sources the entire article because “experts tend to want to add information or rewrite paragraphs that do not include their quotes.”

After interviewing experts, the writer decides the most vital pieces of information to include within the narrow space constraints. Therefore, even if an expert tries to discuss the multiple dimensions of domestic violence, the author of the magazine article will only choose the quotes that legitimate his or her particular angle. For example, in his Good Housekeeping article on domestic violence, David France (1995) quotes Ann Jones to support the idea that, since the first shelter for battered women opened, homicide rates have dropped.

“If a woman has an escape hatch, she’ll take it,” says Ann Jones, author of Next Time, She’ll Be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It. (France 1995, Good Housekeeping, p. 150).

This is the only time he quotes Jones. France fails to explain that Jones’s argument also includes the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that keep women from leaving a relationship. Thus, the quote France uses does not represent Jones’s theory or “expertise.” It simply legitimizes his perspective. Most of the time, authors of the magazine articles in this study use only one quote per expert. This minimum usage of an expert’s knowledge misrepresents that expert’s total knowledge and understanding of domestic violence.

I am not arguing that all advice books in the 1980s and 1990s recommend minimal research or that all magazines publish poorly researched articles. However, the dominant trend in advice books for freelance writers has shifted from in-depth research and using experts for information to less rigorous research and using experts for legitimation.
Differences Among Magazines

Most writers’ guidebooks provide general advice for freelance authors applicable to any magazine. Researching the magazine one wants to write for is one of the most consistent suggestions given. Authors should study the magazine’s content in order to produce articles that the magazine might accept—thus reproducing the style of the magazine. Also, some writers’ guidebooks give implicit and explicit clues to a magazine’s agenda, which affects the framing of articles. In “Writing for the Women’s Magazines,” Elaine Fantle Shimberg (1988, p. 175) notes, “It’s not enough to write about a problem. You must also describe how the reader can solve it.” She emphasizes that “the most important key on your typewriter is the ‘you.’ Don’t tell the reader about ‘some people.’ Instead, say ‘You may find that . . .,’” or “You should watch for the following symptoms” (ibid.).

Young women’s magazines follow a personal formula and focus on helping teens solve their problems. All of the articles in Seventeen and 'Teen, both of which target teenage girls, use an individual frame of responsibility. These magazines seek articles that focus on intimate relationships, inspirational stories, or personal experiences. Seventeen and 'Teen editors encourage writers to focus on “helpfulness” and “empathy” (Holm 1997). Teenage girls’ magazines reinforce the idea that domestic violence is a private problem that you have to solve primarily on your own. Also focusing on the personal, Good Housekeeping’s editors report that they “typically explain the issue through one woman who faced the problem, in a personal, narrative format” (Gage and Coppess 1994, p. 310). Their most popular category of articles is the dramatic narrative where a woman tells about a problem she overcomes in order to provide an education or inspiration for others who face similar problems. The emphasis is on how the individual overcomes the problem. Not only do Good Housekeeping and Ladies’ Home Journal emphasize personal stories, but they are often described as traditional and conservative. In Good Housekeeping, “the demand is for stories with conservative values and upbeat endings” (Duncan 1986, p. 28). Ladies’ Home Journal “has been a conservative spokesman for the role of women in society. It never editorially endorsed suffrage and was slow to cover the women’s liberation movement” (Endres and Lueck 1995, p. 172).

Glamour, Essence, and McCall’s, more likely to use a cultural/structural or integrational frame of responsibility, take on a more “socially conscious” agenda. Glamour Editor Ruth Whitney encourages articles on social and political issues. She focuses on increasing social issue coverage and decreasing fashion coverage (Endres and Lueck 1995). Essence and McCall’s also call for articles on social and political issues rather than just inspirational or personal experience articles. Essence plays a major role in political and social issues specifically related to black women (Endres and Lueck 1995). For decades, editors at McCall’s have targeted “well researched action-oriented articles and narratives dealing with social problems concerning readers” (Holm 1997, p. 790). “The editors are looking for all kinds of treatment. The documentary, the reportorial piece, charts, quizzes, sociologicalexposés, and both first person and third person narrative accounts” (Polking 1965, p. 246).

A magazine’s audience and agenda may have a great impact on how domestic violence is portrayed. We need to further investigate the resistance to alternative frames. What other factors keep women’s magazines from placing more responsibility on the batterers or on larger structural problems? Understanding what magazines have to gain or lose by using one perspective over another may also help in understanding popular discourse on domestic violence.
CONCLUSION

Most of the articles on domestic violence in these magazines portray domestic violence as a private problem—and most often it is the victim’s problem. She has the responsibility for solving it. People may be shocked by the explicit blame put on the victims with questions such as “What did she do to provoke him?” or statements such as “She deserved it.” But the attention placed on victims in women’s magazine articles is more implicit. They tell nice “it happened to me” stories that place the responsibility on victims for solving the problem of domestic violence, as in the “My Problem and How I Solved It” articles.

James Holstein and Gale Miller (1990, p. 106) argue that labeling a woman as a victim absolves her from “fault for her troubles, and renders her worthy of others’ concern.” The women’s movement has generated public concern for victims of abuse and has developed a discourse that locates the “blame” outside of the victim. However, the dominant discourse in these women’s magazines still places the responsibility for solving the problem on the victim. This dominant individual perspective that places responsibility on the victim normalizes the idea that victims should be held responsible for solving the problem. It assumes that social supports are readily available to help a battered woman leave—shelters to house her, police to protect her, judges to enforce protection orders, employers willing to hire her, and family to support her (Jones 1994).

As Foucault (1978) argues, when one “truth” becomes dominant in a particular discourse, alternative perspectives are silenced. Popular women’s magazines—especially traditional and young women’s magazines—marginalize sociological or feminist perspectives that emphasize social change. We should continue to investigate this marginalization of these sociological and feminist perspectives that emphasize the social and cultural context of domestic violence. Furthermore, we should ask what factors allow abusers to remain in the shadows of popular discourse. Further research on domestic violence representations and victim discourse should consider the implications of empowering victims through their “own voices” when these voices are filtered through the women’s magazine publishing industry. How do we include the victim’s voice without ignoring the cultural and structural context within which the victim is situated?

There does appear to be hope. Articles calling for social change have appeared in various magazines. Foucault contends that we can learn from these ruptures of dominant discourse. Perhaps, then, we can learn from these rare occurrences in an attempt to alter this discourse. However, as long as these magazines continue to locate the victims’ experiences within a discourse that silences the role of the abuser and of society, individuals will continue to not ask, “Why does he hit her?” or “Why does he get away with hitting her?” Even though victims of domestic violence continue to encounter institutional, structural, and cultural barriers that keep them from leaving, we should not be surprised that people continue to ask “Why doesn’t she leave?”

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NOTES

1. I say that all articles are primarily about heterosexual relationships because some articles discussed domestic violence in general but the examples used were clearly of heterosexual relationships.

2. People are often considered “victims” when they meet the following conditions: (1) they have suffered a loss unfairly or undeservedly; (2) the loss has an identifiable cause; and (3) the legal or moral context of the loss entitles them to social concern (Bayley 1991). Although not all battered women and men consider themselves victims, I argue that the articles in these women’s magazines portray the battered person as one who meets these conditions. Therefore, I use the term “victim” to describe those who are portrayed in these articles as battered or abused.

3. McCracken (1993) argues that the “My Problem and How I Solved It” stories are not true stories as Good Housekeeping may have you believe. She argues that no author’s name claims responsibility for the feature story and that most likely fiction and real life are blended together to create the story. Although the stories are written as if they are about one woman, it is true that none of these “My Problem and How I Solved It” articles on domestic violence attributed authorship to anyone until the May 1996 article “Invisible Bruises” by Lauri Burgdorff as told to Jean Libman Block.

4. “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” was one of the series of articles that prompted a group of feminists to take over the editorial offices of the Ladies’ Home Journal on March 18, 1970. In a sit-in that lasted eleven hours, more than a hundred feminists demanded that then-editor John Mack Carter be replaced by a woman editor. They called for a revamping of editorial policy to support the goals of the current feminist movement. Although these demands were not met, the Journal did allow feminists to publish a section of the August issue of Ladies’ Home Journal (Hunter 1990).

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