

# **A Road Not Traveled Alone:**

## **The Lived Experience of Rural, Reentry Women and the Relationships that Sustain Them**

**Cassandra Robison**

**DISSERTATION.COM**



Boca Raton

*A Road Not Traveled Alone:  
The Lived Experience of Rural, Reentry Women and the Relationships that Sustain Them*

Copyright © 2007 Cassandra Robison

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

Dissertation.com  
Boca Raton, Florida  
USA • 2008

ISBN-10: 1-59942-682-X  
ISBN-13: 978-1-59942-682-2

## ABSTRACT

Although the literature contains much research about reentry women in past decades, that research focused primarily on white, middle class women. It is rich with studies in mentoring, but previous studies rarely explored the crucial connections between reentry women and mentoring. This study bridges the gap by exploring the experiences of 10 multicultural, reentry women in the rural South at a small community college. The researcher conducted audio-taped interviews of all participants and collected several prose artifacts offered by participants. Initially, the typed transcripts were analyzed and coded into major categories; codes were collapsed and meaning making continued until 5 themes emerged that best evinced the essence of the participants' experience. The findings show that reentry women rely on a broad nexus of support critical to their success. The study identified the importance of informal mentors and found specific ways that academia might support reentry women. As reentry women journey through academe, they find their voices, indicating growing confidence and a sense of empowerment. Such positive changes make theirs a heroic, transformative journey. Despite substantial barriers and real world demands, reentry women endure and succeed, bettering their own lives, their families' lives, and, ultimately, their communities. Their story reflects a half century of societal change regarding women's roles. In the 21st century, reentry women form a growing and substantial population in higher education, thus institutions, educators, and staff must better understand and support them. This study offers specific recommendations for building such support systems and enacting positive social change.

A Road Not Traveled Alone:  
The Lived Experience of Rural,  
Multicultural, Reentry Women  
and the Relationships that Sustain Them

by

Cassandra Johnson Robison

A.A., Jamestown Community College, 1975  
B.A., State University of New York, Fredonia, 1977  
M.Ed., English, University of Arizona, 1983

Dissertation  
Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Education

Walden University  
August 2007

## DEDICATION

**Dedication:** For Maria Deckner, whose mentorship guided me back to college; for Ida Hedin, whose unconditional support of me as a child still echoes in my heart; and for reentry women everywhere.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my mentors, Dr. Catherine Marienau (chair of the dissertation committee), Dr. Kathleen Taylor, and Dr. Sigrin Newell, whose guidance, feedback, and encouragement were essential to me the past 5 years. Each gave me something of great value that kept me going personally and helped me grow as a scholar. Dr. Marienau and Dr. Taylor inspired me to this topic by their fine scholarship, interest in reentry women, and understanding of mentoring. Dr. Newell helped me with research design. All three challenged and encouraged me. It is due to their mentoring that I have come this far. I am grateful to them always and shall pay it forward.

I would like to thank the staff of the Walden Library, who have offered well-needed assistance countless times, and who have always been friendly and professional. I thank Jeff Zuckerman, whose zest for language was an inspiration, and whose workshops prepared me for the proposal defense and the final defense. I extend a special note of gratitude to Dr. Dia Sekayi who was a source of inspiration.

I am indebted to the democratic vision of Dr. Clifton Conrad who inspired my interest in higher education while I was a master's level student in English with a minor in higher education at the University of Arizona. Dr. Conrad's deep and abiding faith in the inherent democracy of public education still shines in my teacher's heart. I am sure he has inspired a generation of educators and scholars.

I am deeply grateful to many reentry women students who taught me the value of mentoring, and who continue to inspire me. Georginia Brownell Uribe's insight

suggested the title of this paper, and Natalie Lyons' emerging voice became poetry. Each has taught me the value of mentorship.

I wish to acknowledge a number of professors who inspired me along the way, notably Dr. Margaret Fleming, professor emeritus, University of Arizona, a formal mentor; Tristram Barnard, Dr. Henry Salerno, Dr. Robert Schweik (SUNY, Fredonia); and Dr. Raymond Hagstrom, Dr. Raymond Eckstrand, and Dr. Harry Bridges (Jamestown Community College, New York). I thank my colleagues, Dennis Pritchard and Joan Warner (Jamestown High School, New York). Their standards of excellence and quality of character will always be a part of my teaching and my self.

I am grateful to my colleague Judy Haisten, whose partnership in scholarship always nurtured my spirit and without whose friendship and collegiality I might not have made it through this journey through academe. Thanks to Deans June Jones, Sharon Cooper, and Joanne Bellovin, whose support both personal and professional kept me going.

On a personal level, I thank my wonderful sons, Aryl Robison and Brennan Robison, who always support me; my daughter in law, Pati, whose work ethic inspires me; and my mother, Barbara Forsberg, whose example taught me to endure. Finally, warm thanks to my sister, Victoria Johnson Barone, whose wisdom and kindness continue to illuminate my life; to poet Suzanne Keyworth, my treasured friend; and to my friend, Pat Singer Doyle, who has seen me through half a century of transformation.

Such a nexus of support sustains me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
CHAPTER 1: .....	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
Historical Context .....	1
Problem Statement .....	4
Purpose .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Conceptual Frameworks .....	6
Terms of Importance in this Study .....	8
Role and Perspective of the Researcher .....	10
Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations .....	11
Significance of the Study .....	13
Relevance to Social Change .....	16
Summary .....	16
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	18
Overview .....	18
Critical Theory, Feminism, and Transformational Learning .....	18
Constructivism and Its Applications to Reentry Women’s Development .....	22
Foundations of Mentoring .....	25
Narrative and the Development of Voice .....	28
Reentry Women in the Literature .....	30
Methods of Inquiry and the Choice of Phenomenology .....	31
Justification of First Person Point of View for Qualitative Study .....	33
Summary .....	34
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD .....	35
Overview .....	35
Design .....	36
Research Site and Population .....	37
Site .....	37
Population .....	38

Evidence of Scientific Rigor.....	40
Audit Trail .....	40
Assurance of Data Quality .....	40
Methods to Ensure Ethical Treatment of Subjects .....	41
Data Collections .....	42
Data Analysis .....	43
Results.....	44
Summary .....	45
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	46
Overview.....	46
Findings for the Overarching Research Question.....	46
Participants .....	47
Discussion of the Five Emergent Themes .....	47
Reasons for College Entrance .....	49
Support Systems: Domestic and Academic .....	52
Barriers Encountered .....	62
Self-Perception, Including Voice and a Woman's Place in the World .....	68
Final Thoughts .....	73
Summary .....	74
CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	75
Overview.....	75
Major Findings.....	76
Organizing Metaphor and use of Quote.....	78
Interpretation of Findings .....	79
Given Voice as Metaphor .....	80
Silenced Voices .....	85
Growing Voices .....	85
Given Voice. ....	86
Conclusions.....	90
Characteristics and Qualities .....	90
Sources of Support .....	92
Changes and Transformations .....	93
Recommendations Regarding Reentry Women.....	94
Recommendations for Action .....	94

Institutional Recommendations .....	96
Faculty and Staff Recommendations .....	97
Directions for Further Study .....	97
Reflections on the Researcher’s Personal Experience .....	99
Significance of the Study .....	100
Summary .....	102
Implications for Positive Social Change.....	103
REFERENCES .....	104
APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER .....	111
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	113
APPENDIX C: PROSE ARTIFACT .....	116
APPENDIX D: JOURNAL ARTIFACT .....	118
APPENDIX E: POETRY ARTIFACT .....	119
APPENDIX F: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION WITH DEVELOPING CODES .....	122
APPENDIX F: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTION WITH DEVELOPING CODES.....	122
APPENDIX G: CODING CATEGORIES .....	131
APPENDIX H: AUDIT TRAIL .....	132
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	133

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Participant Demographic Data .....	48
TABLE 2: Recommendations for Reentry Women, Institutions of Higher Learning, and Faculty & Staff .....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Nexus of Support for Reentry Women .....53  
FIGURE 2: Influences That Support and Reflect Positive Change in Reentry Women  
.....94

## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Historical Context

During the past 35 years, the student population in American institutions of higher education has changed dramatically to include women students in numbers previously unimagined. The sweeping social changes in both laws and ideologies of the 1960s changed the lives of women forever. A number of factors can be cited as influencing the demographic shift in higher education, but one can reasonably name the heightened awareness of civil rights and women's rights, the goals of the feminist movement, and the evolution of advanced birth control methods that gave women control over their physical selves that in turn allowed them new freedom over their lives. For the first time in history, women of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century had the deliberate choice of what to do with their lives following high school. The significance of this is truly revolutionary.

Offered new venues and freedom, women began to enter colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers; in response, most institutions eradicated men or women only policies and opened their doors to qualified students of both genders. Women's studies and feminist criticism became respected domains in the best universities. Women began to assume positions of power and privilege as a result of higher education. Equity has not yet been attained, but conditions have improved for women students and women faculty.

Mezirow (1978) was the first to highlight the phenomenon of the reentry woman—a woman of older than traditional age returning to academe to pursue a degree or an advanced degree. Such women have specific and singular needs, according to their personal lives. Reentry women might be single parents, live below the national standard of living, work one or more jobs, and suffer or have suffered emotional or physical abuse. This student population is substantively different than the 18 year old son or daughter sent off to a fully paid education with an in loco parentis concept of dorm and college life. The demographics of higher education had been dramatically changed.

Older, adult women return to school for varying reasons, such as the disorienting dilemma noted by Mezirow (1997, 1978) as widowhood, divorce, job loss, or single parenthood. Some return for vocational change (Clayton & Smith, 1987; Padula, 1994). They may not know precisely why they return to school, driven instead by the intuitive impetus towards self-actualization. In all aspects, this population is different from the traditional college student of the past and the present.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) addressed the concern of emerging voice and the differing ways adult women learners had of experiencing and engaging the world. Belenky et al. theorized that women students, particularly older women students, had trouble finding their voice—speaking for themselves, saying no, asserting their boundaries. This development of voice is crucial to this study's thesis and its method of inquiry as will be further discussed in chapter 2.

Today, women students comprise 56% of the student population in higher education, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2006, Center for Education

Statistics, table 170). Reentry women form a substantial portion of those women students, 41% or higher (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Touchton & Davis, 1991; U.S. Dept. of Education Report, 1995). Adult women students have become a significant factor in American higher education:

In 2006, the numbers of older adult women students in higher education are greater than at any time in history. About 56% of undergraduates in the nation's colleges and universities are women, according to the report. The data reflect the significant progress made by women in higher education since the early days of the women's movement in the 1970s, when they represented just over 4 in 10 college students. Since that time the availability of community college programs designed to meet the needs of nontraditional students has expanded considerably, perhaps contributing to the increase in enrollments of older women. (Manzo, 2004)

Current research indicates that reentry women face substantial obstacles unique to their experience in higher education and related to their diverse roles and multitasked lives (Droegkamp & Taylor, 1995; Gianakos, 1996; Kartje, 2000; Taylor & Marienau, 1995). Research has established that reentry women profit from formal and informal mentoring, a unique tutelage and support system that guides such women towards positive models of self and serves to support and challenge them on their journey through higher education (Belenky et al., 1986; Dirkx, 1997; Taylor & Marienau, 1995; Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). As noted by Taylor, Marrienau, and Fiddler (2000), the value of mentoring is supported by Kegan's (1982) comment that "Who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes" (p. 19). Such a mentoring experience may be offered by professionals in the field of higher education and also by personal friends, colleagues, children, employers, and ministers. I term this important support system a nexus of others. Reentry women may profit from a unique

nexus of others who support, nourish, and sustain them, and who offer a construct from which reentry students develop voice; moreover, this development of voice implies a connection to self-esteem and confidence, changing frames of reference, and an empowered view of themselves and their status in the world. It may in many cases remove reentrywomen from harm's way and improve their own and their family's standard of living. In so doing, their success contributes to the enrichment of their societies.

### Problem Statement

Little research has been done on reentry women and their relationship to support systems. Although the current literature is rich with information on the value of mentoring and some recent dissertation research deals with reentry women, few studies address both. Even fewer studies include multicultural, multiracial reentry women (Johnson-Bailey & Brown, 1997), focusing instead on white middle-class women and generalizing the results. According to Caffarella and Olson (1993), generalizations of this sort are inappropriate and need to include a broad cultural sampling when studying reentry women. Previous research concluded that reentry women succeed due to a number of factors, including persistence and support systems that address their singular concerns (McGiveney, 2004). Johnson-Bailey (1997, 2001) identified a critical relationship between mentors and the academic success of minority reentry students. A review of the literature proves that studies rarely address the relationship of reentry women in relationship to a broader nexus of support. A ProQuest search indicated that six dissertations have been conducted about reentry women during the past 5 years, in

contrast with 1,107 on mentoring and 37 on older women in higher education (June 19, 2006 at [www.waldenu.edu/dissfind.html](http://www.waldenu.edu/dissfind.html)). No dissertations were found to have been written on a topic that directly explores reentry women and their nexus of support. The current study seeks to bridge this critical gap.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experience of reentry women and the nexus of others that sustain them on their journeys in higher education. The pertinent and “single, overarching question” (Creswell, 1998, p. 99) that guided this study was, “What is the essence of the experience of reentry women, and how—if at all—does a nexus of others sustain them?”

Through the in depth personal interviews with 10 reentry women, I strove to “determine what an experience means” for such women who may be able to “provide a comprehensive description of it,” as suggested by Moustakas (1994, p. 54). From the narratives of their lived experience, I hoped to ascertain the essential meanings both common and unique to reentry women that would provide readers with the “essentially invariant structure or essence of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). The participants themselves may have discovered truths in the inherent self-reflection and telling of their own stories. This study’s research contributed to the literature in a significant way about reentry women in higher education and their need for support systems. Findings that resulted from this study provide description and further information about the needs of a growing student demographic in higher education. This phenomenological research study provided information about reentry women in higher education not previously addressed

in the literature, explored the unique bridge between reentry women and mentoring, and offered data regarding multiracial and multicultural participants.

### Research Questions

This study sought to answer one overarching question, What is the essence of the experience of reentry women in higher education and their relationships with a nexus of others who offer support? In addition, it sought to answer a subset of critical questions regarding mentoring, support systems, and other emerging issues in an iterative and critically reflective fashion. The subset of questions can be found in the Methodology section in chapter 3.

### Conceptual Frameworks

Three major theoretical perspectives informed this study. Transformational learning was joined by feminist theory and critical theory to provide the conceptual frameworks for this research. In 1978, Mezirow conducted a grounded theory study of what he termed *reentry women* in education. His research resulted in a theory of transformational learning. Mezirow posits that women's lives and their frames of reference are literally and figuratively transformed by their experiences in higher education. According to Mezirow's theory of perspective change among reentry women, changing frames of reference result in altered concepts of self, including an awakening consciousness of self-identity and a change or shift of a woman's perceived role within her world.

Both critical theory and feminist theory accept the notion of education as political and transformational, notions inherent in the current research study As noted by

McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) and Vaz (1997), some forms of research “are concerned with giving voice to those who have been silenced or marginalized and with the emancipatory possibility for those participating in the research” (Merriam, 2002, p. 69). This concept of giving voice to people who have previously been silenced lies at the heart of research that provided a venue for reentry women to tell their stories and in so doing perhaps discover their own truths; for the researcher, it provided an avenue to explore in depth the experience of reentry women and discover more about the phenomenon (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Vaz, 1997).

A feminist perspective argues that truth is differential for individuals, according to their race, gender, and class. As such, a feminist perspective in research recognizes and celebrates individuality. Feminist perspective relies upon a certain indefinable sensibility of human dialogue and engagement, one particularly relevant when dealing with women (Belenky et al., 1986). The goal of feminist research approaches is “to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 1998, p. 83).

In complement, critical theorists question, challenge, and strive to better understand the values and hierarchies of society (Merriam, 2002). The interweaving of critical and feminist theories produced a unique perspective. It was through these lenses that I could establish rapport, gather data from observation and interviews, listen critically, analyze and interpret, and draw conclusions. The study profited by the

frameworks of transformational learning theory, feminist theory, and critical theories in my quest to understand the experience of reentry women and their nexus of others.

#### Terms of Importance in this Study

*Culture of oppression:* Any group or portion of society that restricts the freedom of another group and/or with deliberation prevents the emancipation and freedom of action and thought of others. This concept may regard gender, race, creed, or other criteria (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1999; Jasinki, 2004; Maher & Tetreault, 1994).

*Frames of reference:* How an individual views the world and sees herself within that worldview (Schön, 1986).

*Mentoring:* The official or unofficial tutoring and support offered by one person to another, sometimes in a formal capacity and others in an informal manner. This unique tutelage implies a level of support, care, nurturing, sharing of knowledge, protection, and assistance (Bloom, 1995; Daloz, 1986; Daloz-Parks, 2000; Taylor, 1995; Taylor & Marienau, 1995; Taylor et al., 2000; Zachary, 2000).

*Formal mentoring:* A person appointed officially to serve as tutor and guide, sometimes in a professional or educational setting. The mentoring implies a guiding of one person by another. The duties of such a mentoring relationship are often clearly established beforehand and understood by both mentor and mentee.

*Informal mentoring:* An unofficial mentoring of one person by another as tutor, guide, or helper that may or may not be verbalized or acknowledged by one or both of the participants within the mentoring relationships. The informal mentor serves as some kind of nurturing and guiding force.

*Narrative:* Literally, a story. In this research, the term is taken to mean or imply a personal story told about a life experience that conveys a sense of the protagonist's journey and an example of her lived experience (Belenky et al., 1986; Bloom, 1995; Brookfield, 1986; Caffarella, 1999; Clark, 1999; Daloz, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Merriam & Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000).

*Nexus of others:* A support system formed by a group of formal and informal mentors, who guide, nurture, champion, and support a person in some fashion; in this study, a reference to a group of individuals who in some way aid the reentry woman on her educational journey. (This is my own terminology based on the writings of educational experts on mentoring, notably Bloom, 1995; Marienau & Taylor, 1995; and Taylor, 1995).

*Patriarchal culture:* A culture that was established by and retains its power by a systematic belief that women should be limited to certain roles in society and that the male gender is superior to the female gender. It contains elements of bigotry and gender bias and specific role expectations in regards to women and wives (Bachman & Saltzman, 2006; hooks, 1999; Jasinki, 2004; Lenton, 1995; Wade, 2004).

*Reentry women:* Adult students age 25 and over who are entering or returning to college after a period of 5 or more years (Mezirow, 1978; Reisinger, 1999).

*Transformative learning:* As initially defined by Mezirow (1978), Mezirow (1995; 1997) and Mezirow and Associates (2000), transformational learning is the idea that learning is a longitudinal process through which the individual is transformed in

frames of reference and voice. (Cranton, 1997; Dirkx, 1997; Pilling-Cormick, 1997; Schön, 1986).

*Voice:* In this research study, voice refers to the emergence of a capacity to tell one's story and to speak for oneself to the world at large. The development of voice indicates a recognition of self as an independent agent and some esteem for the parameters of selfhood. As defined by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), voice is critical in the development of women learners and in truly transformational learning. (In addition, Bloom, 1995; Taylor, 1995; Taylor & Marienau, 1995).

#### Role and Perspective of the Researcher

My political sympathies from an early age lay with the oppressed, the undervalued, those with small voices or no voices at all. I was raised in a democratic home with Swedish immigrant parents; my maternal grandfather was a union organizer in the 1930s. Personally, my own education has been a journey of transformation, my life empowered emotionally, intellectually, and professionally by learning and studies in academe. I have been deeply and positively influenced, nourished, and sustained by a nexus of others. I not only recognize but also have experienced the chasm of oppression some women students dare to face and bridge in their journey of education. This perspective was understood as my subjective, personal experience, and was bracketed appropriately as called for in phenomenological study. Nonetheless, the establishment of rapport with participants called for some sharing of experience on my part; for this reason, the study was written in the first person formal point of view as suggested by feminist criticism and as accepted as appropriate in qualitative study by Hatch (2002).

## Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations

### *Assumptions*

This research project rested on the assumptions that the pursuit of self-knowing and the quest for self-actualization (Mazlow, 1968) are inalienable human rights. I see reentry women as a symbol of the democratic values and idealism of the Progressive Party of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Chautauqua Movement (1874), which advocated education for all and bringing education to the people, regardless of color, gender, or creed. I interpret these ideals to be appropriate feminist assumptions for this study. Such assumptions find support in Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which the author declares education a political act and a political state.

I selected a unique group of participants from the rural South. I assumed that some of these women had been silenced during their adult lives and that the interviews and inherent self-reflection of the narrative process might give voice to some of the participants. They were required to share personal, even intimate, details of their emotional lives with me as part of their narratives, and in so doing, I assumed they shared their stories honestly and authentically.

In my years as an educator, I have observed the exhaustive and sometimes dangerous experiences of reentry women and their inability to speak for themselves, a trait that seems connected somehow to a missing sense of self. At the same time, these women exhibited admirable resolve and tenacity of purpose. Perhaps it is this paradox that makes them remarkable. Although their lives may seem outwardly successful as

wives, mothers, and workers, many spent their lives so interwoven with others' needs that their own identities were lost. Others have arrived on the doorstep of academe directly from perilous domestic conditions of abuse and violence and a poverty of spirit as well as material wealth. Reentry women often arrive desperately seeking something; acting out of some fundamental and intrinsic core of self-preservation. For them particularly, the journey through higher education may be heroic, transformational, and truly emancipatory. These assumptions underlay my research.

### *Delimitations*

This study focused on the lived experiences of 10 representative reentry women in central Florida at a small community college (6000 or fewer full time students in a given semester) and at two Florida universities. Although its findings may be illustrative of a generalized student population and cultural phenomenon, the findings refer only to the specific participants and site.

### *Limitations*

Participants' responses required a certain setting free or exposing truths that have heretofore been hidden. It was anticipated that some of the participants might be reluctant to share such intimate truths. Answering the questions and talking about their experiences and identifying a nexus of others—some obvious and some personal or even secret—involved a critical reflection on their part on deep levels. As such, they were permitted to self-limit answers, offer partial information, or not answer questions that threatened them. These limitations were accepted a priori.

### Significance of the Study

Although the literature of the 1990s contains various important studies on reentry women, the current century does not; moreover, those previously done involved predominantly white, middle-class participants. This study, in contrast, explored the narratives of 10 women of various cultures and backgrounds, many of them poor and from blue collar families. The importance of mentors and mentoring has been established in the literature (Bloom, 1995; Daloz, 1986; Daloz-Parks, 2000), but no studies have examined the broader context of a *nexus of others* as critical to the success of reentry women's journey in higher education. Thus, an in depth study of reentry women's experience and their nexus of support inside of and outside of academe was appropriate and relevant. Most significant among reasons for the current study was the fact that some reentry women face not only difficult but also dangerous barriers when they enter academe. Particularly in the rural South, where a gun culture and patriarchy pervades, women are sometimes at desperate risk when they attempt to leave marriages or change their perceived roles in some fashion, such as pursuing a college degree. In such a culture, unequal power relationships exist that inherently repress women's roles to subservient and domestic standards (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995). The literature concludes that women are in most danger while they are leaving a relationship and hold "egalitarian views" about males and females (Jasinski, 2001, p. 31). A white male patriarchy, particularly as exhibited in the Old South, continues to suppress women and racial minorities (Wade, 2004). Women separated from their husbands may be three times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than divorced women and 25 times