

An Annotated Dissertation Proposal Using Qualitative Methods

Approval of the “open-ended hunting licenses” requested by many qualitative proposals comes easily neither to dissertation committees nor to funders. Avoiding such a request is an early problem of qualitative researchers. This proposal by Bill Warters does so. While Warters makes it clear that he is open to what will be found, he has targeted the groups from whom to collect data (batterers of women who have been through treatment programs and the staffs of those programs), what he wishes to talk to them about (the perceptions of batterers of their problem and of treatment staff of the batterers), and where he anticipates there is a problem (the incongruity in perceptions of the two groups).

Warters’s problem may seem more structured from the outset than many qualitative dissertation proposals but that is only because he has done more work on the problem before formulating his proposal. Pilot work solves the “hunting license” problem, for as the piloting proceeds, one can usually shape the study into a structured form that becomes the proposal’s basis—the focus of activity becomes clear and the choice of method, persons, and places of data collection all fall into place. Those may indeed change as the study proceeds; indeed, they often do (just as, if something of greater interest appears, they might have with Warters’s study—targeted as it was). Such changes occur regardless of method. But the proposal provides grounds for agreement between doctoral committee and student as to how to proceed and what to expect, as best that can be anticipated.

Unless obliged to by a funder’s form or an institution’s requirements, writers of qualitative proposals are much less likely to follow a common format or structure. But one can provide a checklist of aspects that should be included in all such proposals:¹

1. An initial focus or question that provides boundaries for your inquiry and a rationale for doing the study that includes:

1. Adapted from Egon Guba (undated), *Essential elements in a naturalistic thesis proposal*, unpublished manuscript, Indiana University, Bloomington.

2. who will be studied and what they represent and what contexts will be studied and what they represent,
3. the approach used such as symbolic interactionism, ethnography, etc.,
4. your qualifications and experience with this approach,
5. the methods of data collection,
6. the methods of data analysis, and
7. anticipated ethical problems and how they will be handled.

Comments in *italic* below will note how these aspects are covered in this proposal and discuss, as well, other aspects. Paragraph numbers have been added for ease of reference. The original proposal's list of references was omitted to provide more space for comments.

THE CHANGE PROCESS IN MEN WHO BATTER WOMEN

A Dissertation Proposal by Bill Warters

1. I am proposing to conduct a qualitative study with participants of several treatment programs designed to change men who batter their wives and women friends. The emphasis will be on the experiences of men who have gone through these programs in attempts to end their violence. Also central to the research agenda will be an examination of the interaction between the contemporary social construction of domestic violence by program staff, and the way the issue is understood and explained by the program participants/clients themselves. I contend that the ways in which program staff "construct" and define the problem of domestic violence clearly affects the design and delivery of services to abusive men, and ultimately affects the messages that men receive from the programs about their violence. If program coordinators understand and define the problem in ways that are very different from the men in the programs, it may lead to fewer effective interventions, or at least to significant struggles with the men over the meaning of their experience. To assist in the possible improvement of treatment programs for men who batter, I will try to provide much lacking insight into the world view of the male participants in batterers treatment programs. The research will incorporate interviews with program staff, observation of group sessions, and surveys and in-depth interviews with men's treatment program members and "graduates" at 3–4 different batterers treatment programs located in the State of New York.

Paragraph 1. An excellent introductory paragraph! It covers many of the required items: question, significance, context, and sample and describes the methods of data collection. Thus, several critical parts of the required set are already covered well enough to set a framework in the reader's mind that can be filled in by succeeding sections—all this in 240 words!

Significance

The significance of the problem briefly noted in the introductory paragraph is "driven home" in this section that places it in a broad context.

2. There is now ample documentation of the widespread nature of domestic violence and of its costs to individuals and society. National studies indicate that at least 1 in 10 American women each year are beaten by the men in their lives and that at least 1.8 million women are severely beaten every year. The National Center for Disease Control recently reported that attacks by husbands on wives result in more injuries to women requiring medical treatment than rapes, muggings, and auto accidents combined. Other studies show that 40% of all murdered women are killed by their husbands or lovers (NCADV 1985).

3. While clearly the social and political movements to establish shelters for battered women have provided a significant reprieve for many abused women, it is estimated that more than 30–50% of women using shelters return to battering relationships (Martin, 1976; Roberts, 1981). Even if the abusive relationship is severed, the male frequently finds another mate that he also abuses (Shainess, 1977). Because of these concerns, practitioners, politicians and researchers on family violence have increasingly advocated counseling and reeducation programs for the abusive men.

4. Programs to treat this population are proliferating. Current estimates show close to 300 programs in existence in the United States and over 140 in Canada. One indication of the growing trend of interest in treatment programs for men who batter is that there have now been at least four annual midwest regional conferences, three west-coast regional conferences, and two national conferences all focused specifically on working with "batterers." Domestic violence is also clearly growing as a distinct area for scholarship and research, with at least three national research conferences having now been hosted, and since 1986, three new national scholarly journals have been devoted to the subject.

5. My project, as currently conceived, will begin filling a void of theory and information regarding how contemporary social service representatives, particularly those working directly with abusive men, are personally conceptualizing the problem of domestic violence by men and seeking to address it, but more importantly, the study will directly address the even greater lack of data on battering and the responses to it as perceived by the male perpetrator.

Paragraphs 2–5. Note how these paragraphs use a "funnel" approach, starting with the problem of abuse of women broadly, moving to treatment programs, their growth, their study, and, finally, his study. This is a common and very effective way of placing one's study in its larger context.

6. In my review of the literature I have found little qualitative or context-specific research on batterers in which men tell of their experiences and perceptions. I have come across one conference paper (Adams 1985), one Master's thesis (Ptacek 1985), one published dissertation (Stets 1988) and four published journal articles that use the words and perspectives of male abusers as their primary data (Harris and Bologh, 1985, Gondolf and Hanneken 1987, Gondolf 1985, Coleman 1980). While some valuable qualitative work has been done on men who rape, and on men incarcerated for violent crimes (Amir 1971, Athens 1974, 1986, Beneke 1982, Groth 1979), there apparently remains a lack of insight into the more commonplace reality of domestic violence from the male perpetrators point of view.

Paragraph 6. Simply citing studies doesn't do it! The implication of the writer is that although there are six items that "use the words and perspectives of male abusers as their primary data," none has any findings that would be helpful to this study. Doesn't sound reasonable, does it? We'll bet the doctoral committee wondered about this too and the final write-up included some comment on this aspect. The proposer must show both that the literature is understood and how that understanding leads to implications for the current study—or if there are no implications, why there are none. Showing how one is "standing on others' shoulders" is important in the literature review. That isn't demonstrated in this proposal yet; one knows mainly that he's been to the library.

7. As an indication of this gap, Edleson et al. (1985) in their article "Men Who Batter Women: A Critical Review of the Evidence" stated that,

In the past decade the issue of battered women has come to the center of public attention. However, the men who batter and their perceptions of such violence have been largely overlooked. The published research presents a view of battering largely from the victim's perspective, in contrast to research on other kinds of social deviance. (emphasis added)

8. In his 1987 article, "Evaluating Programs for Men Who Batter: Problems and Prospects," sociologist Edward Gondolf indicates that

The review of the research on batterer programs indicates the need for evaluation studies that address the following questions. 1) Which treatment modalities are most effective in reducing wife abuse? 2) What contribution does the participation in a group process make to the reduction of wife abuse? (p. 101)

My research could begin to address these important and elusive questions.

9. In his recent book, *Stopping Family Violence: Research Priorities for the Coming Decade*, David Finkelhor (1988) lists 11 areas of "high priority research on spouse abuse." First on his list is research on what stops wife abuse. He strongly recommends a study that would "elicit ideas directly from perpetrators and victims

about what works to end abuse." Criminologist Lee Bowker (1983) has already conducted a study of women who have escaped wife abuse, which was published under the title *Beating Wife Beating*, but no major study has yet examined men's strategies for ending abuse. According to Finkelhor, "the abusers need to be asked what were the considerations that lead them to stop, what did they see as the 'costs' to their behavior. (p. 91)"

Paragraphs 7–10 nicely marshall evidence from the literature to support his approach.

10. Finally, the study represents a significant addition to the growing body of work in the relatively new area of research known as "men's studies" (Brannon 1976, Pleck 1981, Gerzon 1982, Doyle 1983, Gondolf 1985, Kimmel 1986, Brod 1987). I believe that the growth of work to end domestic violence is spurring important symbolic struggles over the public and private imaging of appropriate masculinity, and in many ways, I see the groups for men who batter as being both theoretically and practically in the forefront of this struggle over redefinition.

Paragraph 10. Not one to miss a possibility to show the importance of his study in another light, here the problem is put in still another context.

By this point in the proposal, it has become clear that the author plans to compare batterers' perceptions of the problem of men battering women with the perceptions of batterers by staff who structure and administer treatment programs for them. If the two views are incongruent, he anticipates this may provide insights that may lead to improved treatment programs. But, the reader may be asking himself, "What are the proposer's reasons for thinking they may be incongruent?" And, "If they should turn out to be different, may this be because it is a function of the treatment programs to change batterers' perceptions of the problem (especially if they think their emotions are uncontrollable)?"

An answer to the former appears much later in paragraph 23 under the heading "Data Analysis." It might well have been cited in this section as well. But the latter question is not addressed. While it seems likely this aspect will be picked up in the study itself, we suspect that many critical readers would expect it to be covered in the proposal. It is important that the proposal be used to discuss aspects that readers expect to be covered. How well the proposer anticipates their questions determines in large measure their evaluation of the proposal.

As you create any proposal, but doctoral ones especially, keep in the front of your mind that the proposal is a demonstration of your scholarship. Readers already acquainted with your problem, but even those who are bringing their wit and logic to bear on it for the first time, will be thinking of aspects of which they would expect you to be aware. If you don't discuss them in the proposal, it raises questions about how thoroughly you understand your problem, and how competent you are as a researcher.

Methods

Paragraphs 11–17. Here are more of the essentials, details of methods, qualitative orientation to be used, and schedule. While the discussion is begun here, important aspects of it are handled in the section on methodological and theoretical issues that follows.

Lacking here and throughout the proposal is some sense of the schedule on which the activities will be pursued. A proposal for funding requires a time schedule since budget is heavily dependent on the number and length of the activities. Because dissertation proposals usually have no budget, they generally also lack a schedule. This is unfortunate for several reasons:

- 1. Working through a schedule gives the proposer a clearer idea of how well the method section has been thought through and whether some items have been omitted. Schedules that go together easily indicate the proposal is well written—and vice versa.*
- 2. The schedule facilitates judgment of the project's feasibility.*
- 3. Scheduling helps anticipate problems early so one can do something about them, e.g., planning data gathering during a holiday period when staff and others are likely unavailable.*
- 4. In a dissertation proposal, scheduling helps committee members anticipate when you may be needing their attention so they can warn you of conflicts with their calendar.*

Adding a project schedule in at least minimal detail is important!

11. I intend to use qualitative research methodology (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982), in particular in-depth interviewing, to gather and examine accounts given by abusive men of their behavior and the subsequent treatment they receive from third party intervenors. To a lesser extent I will rely on participant observation techniques as a temporary member of the groups I am studying. The study also will include a short survey given to program participants to gather demographic and anecdotal information.

Paragraph 11. It is reassuring that the researcher already has considered the necessity of using three different approaches to gathering qualitative data, thus providing for triangulation of findings—a research quality aspect. A slight question is raised by the very last phrase, “anecdotal information.” Either here, or somewhere in this section, it would be helpful if a sample question were given so that we could see what kind of “anecdotal information” is to be sought here and how it bears on his approach to the problem. Indeed, this is just what he does in paragraph 17, the last in this section. Make your references to data-gathering instruments as concrete as possible—sample questions, names of established instruments, etc.

12. The symbolic interactionist tradition I locate myself in as a researcher assumes that behavior is largely self-determined (i.e., neither biological/ psychological nor social structural factors alone pre-determine behavior) and is observable at both the symbolic and interactional levels. Within this theoretical framework, it is understood that objects in the social world do not have intrinsic meaning but are defined by an individual's plans of action and are in constant flux. Meanings are negotiated and renegotiated during interaction with others. Typically a consensus of meaning is reached in social networks so that people can communicate using shared symbols, and an attempt to understand a particular milieu (such as the one developed within a men's treatment program) fully requires firsthand observation.

Paragraph 12. Note how the phrase in parenthesis in the last sentence brings this highly theoretically oriented paragraph down to earth as it bears on his study. Too many proposals leave the implications of the theoretical material to the reader to infer. Tie it down! It shows you know what you are talking about and not just spouting some professor's rhetoric.

13. I hope to be able to do a substantial amount of my data gathering by observing and talking with men "in situ," which means finding men who are identified as batterers and staying with them in some way that, while acceptable to them, would allow me both intimate observation of certain aspects of their behavior and enable me to report it in ways useful to social science and yet not harmful to them or their partners. My goal is to identify several research settings where I can observe, interview, and casually interact with men who have battered, in a setting that is unique to them, and in which I would present little or no threat. At this time, it seems that batterers' treatment programs are one of the few places where men identified as domestically abusive gather together, and thus these sites are where I will begin my research.

Paragraph 13. Recognition of the importance of ethics need not be reserved to the section on clearance by the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects (paragraphs 45–52). Indeed, it is much more convincing that you are a mature researcher and genuinely concerned about subject protection if, at appropriate points in the proposal (e.g., see also paragraphs 15, 22, and 24), you mention your anticipation of an ethical problem, explain your concern, and indicate how it will be handled. The first sentence here does this well.

14. Herbert Blumer, (1969) one of the founders of the symbolic interactionist tradition within sociology, suggests using "sensitizing concepts" to help us decide where to look while we are gathering and analyzing our data, while avoiding the temptation to too narrowly predetermine what it is that we hope to find. In this spirit, some concepts I am interested in exploring as the study proceeds include the notion of a "moral career" of program participants, the idea of how they are negotiating a stigmatized identity, the idea of a developmental or stage process for change in men who batter, and the impact of perceived "threats" to their core constructs of

masculinity. Analysis of the gathered data will probably include examination of the distinctions between men who report no more abuse, and those who report reoffense. I also will be probing for strategies for staying nonviolent that the men report to have adopted, and what kind of support systems, if any, they claim to rely on. Also subject to analysis will be examples of self-labeling by the men, i.e. "I am a batterer," or "I've been framed," or "It was just a minor incident."

Paragraph 14. What a great way to avoid the open-ended "hunting license" problem of the qualitative researcher; one wants to start focused, yet not too much so as to be closed to what is important. Use of this device, and especially the concrete implementation of it in this paragraph, marks the researcher as knowledgeable about both his method and his problem—a model worth copying!

15. Gradually, as my understanding develops, I will begin to be more focused, and will test assumptions and check out meanings with the men. Eventually I intend to construct an interview schedule based on my developing insights, for use in one-on-one interviews with the men, perhaps in their homes, or at the program site office, or some neutral location that I can secure in the area. I would prefer to interview the men in their homes because it would give me more insight into their worlds, but it may be awkward or impossible if other family members are present.

16. At this time I have but a very general sense of the type of interview schedule I want to use with the men from the programs. It builds on Ed Gondolf's qualitative work with Jim Hanneken on reforming batterers as reflected in their article "The Gender Warrior: Reformed Batterers on Abuse, Treatment, and Change" (Gondolf & Hanneken, 1987), and Jim Ptacek's work as reported in his 1985 Master's Thesis, *Wifebeater's accounts of their violence: Loss of control as excuse and as subjective experience*. The areas of inquiry I am interested in include: recollections of where and when the men first recognized that they had a problem with abuse or were being labeled as an abuser; accounts of their abusive behavior from their perspective; the process of affiliation with the men's program, i.e. first contacts, expectations, impressions of other members, degree of involvement; help seeking behaviors related to abuse before or during the program; the nature of their changes, i.e. what things have stayed the same, and what has changed since contact with the program; onset of the change as related to particular events or insights; turning points for them; motivations for change; maintenance strategies to maintain change; payoffs, if any for ceasing or avoiding abuse; self-labeling and self-concepts regarding themselves and their behavior; the role of the program in their changes and self-definition; and recommendations for other men. Naturally, this list will be modified as the study develops and other relevant categories emerge based on the results of my observations and preliminary interview experiences.

Paragraph 16. Instead of simply stating that he would construct an interview schedule, again, the proposer shows his grasp of his problem by citing very specific topics that will be

included, "standing on the shoulders" of researchers who have gone before. This kind of mastery and use of the literature is just exactly what readers want to see—a person who has mastered the contributions of previous research to his study. It provides a strong counteraction to the impression left earlier in paragraph 6, where he merely mentions studies.

17. To maximize the diversity of types of men I get, I will employ theoretical rather than random sampling procedures to try to interview men from the range of categories of participants that emerge during my initial explorative work. The proposed focus of the study on participants of three or four different programs allows the opportunity for some comparison of treatment modalities, and the identification of specific aspects of group process thought useful by the men themselves in eliminating abuse. After the formal interview(s) I will be asking the men to self-report their level of current abusiveness on a survey instrument that will gather minimal demographic information and abuse self-reports, and that invites them to complete a brief essay on their strategies for remaining nonviolent.

Paragraphs 17, 20–22, 48. Here are further details regarding sample and context (the two are intertwined in this, study as is often the case). As the reference to paragraphs 20–22 and 48 indicates, further information on sampling is to be found at several points in the document. It would have been better to bring it all together at this point to provide the complete picture. We'd also include here paragraph 23 on Wiseman's study that provided a model he is following.

Data Analysis

18. The approach taken to gathering and analyzing the data will be an inductive one (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and will necessarily be adapted as the study proceeds and relevant categories emerge. My data analysis and data collection will be done sequentially with preliminary data analysis informing future data collection. In addition to regular fieldnotes and interview transcriptions, early in the data collection process I will begin to write theoretical notes in which I can play with the data, relating observations to one another, developing new concepts, and linking these to ones in the treatment program literature. Gradually I will integrate these theoretical notes into longer analytic memos that will help further focus my study. This data analysis process should continue during and after data collection until I have developed some kind of guiding metaphor, general scheme, or overall pattern for data analysis that accounts for all the phenomena observed.

19. In addition to the use of memos, the ongoing process of coding my observations and interview transcripts will be central to the data analysis. This will require reading and rereading the data to highlight and label important, descriptive, or informative issues that emerge, for later sorting and categorization. I will be looking at the data with an eye for identifying and discovering classes of things, persons and events and the properties that characterized them. The ultimate goal will be to develop theory that accounts for the men's violent behavior and their subsequent

changes, although at this point, relatively rich description that elegantly describes the experience and the meanings of events for the men in the programs would in itself be a significant contribution to the literature. I will know that I am done when no new ideas or concepts seem to be emerging, and when no negative cases can be found that disconfirm or invalidate the proposed framework of analysis.

Paragraphs 18–19. These first two paragraphs nicely cover another of the essentials, the methods and timing of data processing. They are an excellent two-paragraph summary of the generic data gathering-analysis process! We doubt that his professor could have done any better. Now he must bring it down to earth by showing how it applies to this study—which he does in the next paragraphs.

20. I will begin by exploring five or six possible program sites I know of that are within driving distance of Syracuse. I will meet with the program coordinators and facilitators, explain my project, and then seek permission to interview them and to observe a few groups and conduct interviews with men from the different program sites. Gaining entrée into these sites and to the men who have been through the programs will certainly represent a significant challenge and is an important piece of methodological work in its own right. Still, based on my preliminary explorations and discussions with contacts, and the number of potential programs in the state, it appears at this time I will have no trouble gaining the necessary access to proceed with the study.

Paragraph 19. Recognition of the problem of gaining entrée shows maturity as a qualitative researcher. Citing preliminary positive results adds to the favorable impression.

21. As part of the study, I will interview a total of at least 10 program coordinators and/or counselors drawn from the different batterers programs. The interviews will explore their ideas about and attitudes toward the men they treat, and examine their perceptions about the change process for men in the groups, and finally, solicit their support in contacting former group members.

22. Using an initial introductory letter sent to former group participants by a program coordinator, potential subjects will be requested to return a postcard if they are willing to participate in the study, or also if they have strong objections to being contacted. I will then interview a group of former program participants about their experiences with the domestic violence program and their attempts at changing their abusive behavior.

23. One potential model for my research is provided by Jaqueline Wiseman in her book *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics*. Wiseman takes a qualitative approach to the study of both the alcoholics and the various organizations that treat them, and focuses on the interactions between them. Wiseman found much disparity between the interpretations of events and interactions when described by the alcoholics and by the program staff, despite the program

staff's assumptions that they knew what the alcoholics were thinking. I would hope to gather enough data to conduct similar comparisons regarding men's treatment programs.

Methodological Issues

24. Sensitivity of the subject matter will make rapport building important for successful interviews. I believe that my experience over the years of working in two different batterers programs has given me some insight into the worlds of these types of men, and should help me be an empathic listener. The issue of establishing interviewees trust in me will be a challenge. I will make it clear that in my final writeup, the participating programs and the men who have been through them will have their identities and locations disguised. I have already conducted several interviews with men who have battered their female partners, and based on these experiences I believe it will be possible to get these men to open up to me about their experiences.

25. One of the important things I have learned in my own group work is that there is not always a good correlation between the men's self-report of their behavior and their behavior when it is described by their spouses. It should be understood that I will be attempting to understand and use the men's stories as their representations of a domestic violence related experience, and not as verbatim depictions of physical reality. There is already research on reliability of self-report data by men that I can build into my discussion of the survey results.

Paragraphs 24–25. We noted earlier the need to discuss issues readers might expect a good researcher to address. The two paragraphs above are excellent examples of the writer's doing so! Indicating awareness of the sensitivity of the subject matter and ability to handle it undercuts concerns readers may have had about this issue. Similarly, noting the likely disparity of perceptions of battering between spouses anticipates this issue and shows he is not naive about it. Over and over this graduate student is providing evidence that he is well prepared to take on this dissertation.

Theoretical Issues

In this and the next section the proposer explains the theoretical framework from which he is approaching the problem, an important aspect of qualitative research. We are not sure this discussion is as clear as it might be and may have caused some discussion among his doctoral committee members. How does one catch such sections ahead of time? Have an intelligent friend who is unfamiliar with your problem read your proposal and ask questions about it as he or she goes through it.

26. Theories about the "social construction" of social problems have been developed in sociology that can be used to explain the relatively recent reemergence of wife abuse as a social problem deemed worthy of a public response. (Fuller and Meyers 1941, Blumer 1971, Mauss 1975, Spector and Kitsuse 1977, Pfhol 1977,

Conrad and Schneider 1980, Gusfield 1981, Nelson 1984, Schneider 1985) These theories help us to understand the impact of conditions under which a problem rises to prominence, and to examine some of the other potential ways in which the problem could have been framed had it taken a different route or emerged in a different domain.

27. Public interest in wife abuse is certainly not new. There have been several earlier historical periods during which domestic violence was acted upon collectively through social and legal channels. Elizabeth Pleck, in her book *Domestic Tyranny* (1987) describes several significant domestic violence prevention efforts during three distinct periods of American history. She outlines wife abuse prevention efforts in the early 1600's (among the Puritans in Massachusetts), again in the late 1800's (as an off-shoot of the "child-saving movement") and finally during the recent period beginning in earnest around 1972. For a time (in the early 1900's) there were even reports of vigilante groups, including the Clan and the White Caps, who went out and punished men in the community who were known to be beating their wives. The White Caps were quite different in their ideological outlook than modern feminists, and yet they too took action around the issue of domestic violence.

28. When one steps back and looks at these historical accounts of social and legal responses to domestic violence, one can see that there have been wide-ranging and at times dramatic changes in the way in which the same type of behavior, a man hitting his wife, has been labeled and dealt with by members of society. The definition of an act as violent, its evaluation as socially tolerable or not, and even its emergence in the public consciousness at all, seems to depend on a complex interplay of factors. My intent in this dissertation will be to focus on the impact of the ways in which the problem is being structured in the contemporary period, using historical accounts primarily as a point of comparison.

29. My use of a social constructionist framework is not meant to imply that I believe that domestic violence is really only a problem because of some social fabrication in the media or by social service experts. My work in the field has lead me to believe that the putative conditions of men hitting and hurting women exists. I also believe that there are significant social costs resulting from violence in intimate relationships (for example, medical expenses, runaway or homeless women and youth, increased levels of substance abuse, police and court costs associated with protecting victims, loss of life, etc.) and that reducing the level of violence and its costs is a worthy investment of time and attention.

30. Recently some existential/interactionist sociologists (Erchak, 1984, Ferraro & Johnson 1983, and Denzin, 1984) have begun to look at aspects of the sense of self and the situation of interaction that the self confronts in domestic violence. Their work is somewhat abstract, but it represents an important theoretical basis for future work like my own using a symbolic interactionist perspective on abuse. It represents efforts to tie together different levels of reality, from the individually interpreted meaning of face-to-face situations to the more objectified cultural and

historical meanings of domestic violence. The meanings men give to events, in this case, are essential data. I hope to draw upon these theoretical works as I conduct my data analysis.

Paragraph 30. What do you include and what do you leave out? Here is another instance of this—the researcher holds out hope that these authors “are on to something.” But, if it is important enough to include, then use enough space to explain it clearly; don’t merely allude to it. The sentence beginning “It represents efforts . . .” tantalizes readers without going far enough to help them see for themselves there is likely something there.

Qualifications of the Researcher

31. Ethnographers and qualitative researchers are often encouraged to disclose their personal perspectives on the groups they are studying with readers of their research so that these readers can be conscious of potential bias in the work. I would describe myself as coming from a pro-feminist background and ideology, beginning with my work with Men Against Rape in Santa Cruz, CA in 1980. I have worked as a counselor at two different programs for men who batter, one in Santa Cruz, CA, and now one in Syracuse that I helped to found. I have served as network coordinator for a California network (MATV) of 11 men’s anti violence programs, and now serve as co-coordinator of the Ending Men’s Violence Task Group of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS, formerly the National Organization for Changing Men). As a result of these experiences, I’ve been exposed to a wide range of possible treatment models and to many ongoing debates in the treatment field. I currently edit a small publication, *The Ending Men’s Violence Newsletter*, as part of my work for the Ending Men’s Violence Task Group. I have worked as a classroom educator on domestic violence prevention and child assault prevention, and have helped host four annual men’s public actions known as BrotherPeace, where men speak out in favor of nonviolence. I have received media attention for my work and get paid for my part-time facilitator role. I am clearly currently functioning as an advocate of social intervention to reduce men’s domestic violence. This perspective will most certainly affect my interpretation of events and discussion during the course of my study. I will say that I am not wedded to the idea that treatment programs for men who batter are necessarily the best or most efficient form of social intervention to reduce violence against women, and I remain open to other ideas and approaches.

32. I hope that by continuing to read historical accounts of the wide variation in ways that social problems get dealt with, and by maintaining a critical stance toward my own current work in the field as a counselor in a men’s program, I can see beyond my own ideological and practice assumptions. I am interested in describing how the “social construction” of domestic violence adopted by counselors in treatment programs for men who batter gets passed on to the men who go through their programs, and what some effects of these definitions may be on the men who are supposedly there to end their violence. I am interested in as wide a range as possi-

ble of batterers treatment program participants' experiences. The lived experience of the participant in a batterer's program remains central to my analysis.

Paragraph 31–32. Here the proposer covers his qualifications, another of the essentials of every qualitative proposal. From the standpoint of the researcher being a person on top of his problem, one can hardly ask for more impressive credentials. But, as he himself notes, this makes it more difficult to believe that he will be open to “what is there” without preconceived opinions. In a funded proposal, some additional evidence other than his own claims would be needed. This could be evidence from his previous research or letters of support by other researchers of this person’s ability to seriously consider other than his own perspective. In a doctoral dissertation, this isn’t as much of a problem, and one’s own claim may be all that is available. But any evidence of open-mindedness, such as excerpts from his newsletter indicative of other than a strictly crusading mind, would be helpful.

Contribution to the Field

33. I believe that this project will be an important contribution to the field. If effective systems for reducing domestic violence are to be developed, more information will be needed on how interventions impact on abusers and affect their attitudes and beliefs about the use of force and violence in relationships. We have a growing body of descriptive (primarily demographic or psychological test profiles) information on men who participate in batterers treatment programs, but *very little* information about how these individuals see themselves and their role in the activity. Nor do we have much information on the particular aspects of treatment programs that the men believe support their being nonviolent. This work may in some way help to improve our understanding of the impact of one of the predominant societal responses to men’s violence in relationships, batterers treatment programs. By learning more about the change process for men who batter, efforts to coordinate criminal justice intervention, treatment programs, and self-help groups for batterers may be enhanced, and there is hope that more men may cease to be violent as a result of these enhancements. It is a goal I believe is worth working toward.

Paragraph 33. It is unusual for such a statement to end the body of the proposal. Usually, the statement of contribution is near the beginning to convince reviewers “this is a worthwhile proposal.” Here, it is a bit redundant of what was said previously, though it does serve as a kind of summary of the hoped-for outcomes. All proposals are “works of art” with the proposer adapting format to achieve the desired impression. In this instance, it is ending the proposal on a very positive note—good strategy!

(The following sections appeared each on a separate page as a series of appendixes. To save space, they have been put in run-on form.)

Summary of Progress Toward Completion of Dissertation Research, 1/24/91

Paragraphs 34–42. This “Summary of Progress . . .” is an unusual but excellent addition to the proposal. Such information is usually worked into the body of the proposal. Maybe that is best if the evidence is meager. Where it is extensive, however, putting it in a separate section, as done here, calls attention to it and makes an impressive display. (If you’ve got it, flaunt it? Not always, but in this instance, yes!) It indicates that the researcher is a mature student who is serious about getting on with the work. Note how the description touches on nearly all the things someone concerned about the progress of the student would hope to hear about:

- Contacted authorities who have a need to know about the project and might be helpful,
- Gained access to one of the programs he plans to use,
- Observed in that program and also started interviewing,
- Contacted two other programs and gained approval “in spirit,”
- Applied for research support,
- Had an article on theoretical aspects accepted for publication,
- Freed up time for the research by retiring from his position,
- Began interviewing persons in the social system network that surrounds these men in the community, and
- Continued to read broadly about the problem.

34. I have applied for and gained clearance from the human subjects review board to conduct my research on “The Change Process in Men Who Batter Women.”

35. I have made contact with the Governors Office on Domestic Violence that helps to coordinate the activities of several of the programs I am interested in, and talked with the research officer there about my proposed work. I informed them of my intentions and gained their support and approval to proceed, contingent, of course, on the approval of the program coordinators at the proposed sites.

36. I have met with the program coordinator of one of the three main programs I am interested in gaining access to and have gained permission to sit in on group sessions and conduct interviews with current participants in the program. I am working on a sample letter and postcard to be used in recruiting former group participants. This letter is still subject to some review and revision prior to approval for mailing by the program coordinator. The program coordinator himself has also agreed to participate in in-depth interviews.

37. I have observed for 3 months now at a batterers program and have begun to do some very preliminary interviews with men who have battered to begin to develop my interview schedule and procedures. To date I have conducted 4 formal interviews and several more are currently being arranged.

38. I have made phone contact with the directors of two other programs in the state that would make appropriate sites for my research. I have gained approval "in spirit" to conduct the research at their sites. I have arranged to meet personally with each of them before the end of February to discuss the specific details of the study and to gain their input and final approval.

39. I have developed an application for a University Graduate Research Award (a maximum award of \$1500, primarily designed for summer support) that I will submit as soon as the competition is formally announced, with the hope that it will support my planned summer research activities as a participant observer in the men's groups. My plan is to conduct at least the first 25–30 formal interviews with men who have battered during the months of June, July, and August.

40. I have had an article pertaining to some of the theoretical aspects of this research accepted for publication during 1991 in the *Men's Studies Review*.

Paragraph 40. Having one's work published prior to completing the dissertation has been unusual, but is becoming more common. It looks good on the vita and gives one an advantage since employers know that those who have already published are more likely to do so in the future.

Having done the literature review and researched the theoretical positions of a problem, any good graduate student is likely to be more up-to-date on that topic than most professors. Those planning a career in higher education would do well to capitalize on this effort by putting their knowledge in writing and publishing it. Not only is this good self-discipline, but it also starts a habit of making use of what has been learned. Remember, science is a communal enterprise; we are not in it just for the personal pleasure (though that is considerable and may alone be worth it) but must all contribute if the community is to grow and thrive. Though satirized by the phrase "publish or perish," good scientists take seriously their responsibility to others to communicate what they have learned.

41. I have made arrangements to "retire" from my role as Program Coordinator for the Campus Mediation Center at the end of this academic year. This will free my time up to completely focus on the dissertation research.

Background Research Activities

42. Since completing the advanced qualitative methods seminar that laid the foundation for my proposal, I have engaged in background research to familiarize me with the possible points of contact a man identified as domestically violent might have with other members of the community. I have been documenting these "points of contact" where men might interact with social systems as a result of their identification as domestically abusive, so that I can intelligently talk to the men about these experiences later during the interview process. To this end, I have interviewed almost two dozen people, usually in an audio-taped interview of over one hour in length, about their contact with and impressions about men who batter. I have cast a rather wide net, using a snowball sampling method, in order to get a

brief taste of the thinking of key people in various local social service agencies. My intent has been to gain a general understanding of how various agency personnel think about the men's violence, and learn how an abuse case would typically move through their systems. These interviews were done as background preparation for the dissertation study which remains focused on the abusers' change experiences while involved in a batterers treatment program.

43. The people who I have interviewed in the preparatory and exploratory stage have included:

- Public Health Social Worker
- Battered Women's Shelter Worker
- Shelter Director and Coordinator of DV Coalition
- Volunteer Center Helpline Coordinator
- Victim Witness Assistance Center Staff Members (2)
- Senior Assistant District Attorney
- County Social Services Administrator
- Mediation Program Coordinator
- Sheriff's Dept. Chief Administrator (formerly of Abused Person's Unit)
- Assistant District Attorneys (2)
- Director of Legal Aid
- Assistant Director at Probation Department
- Chief of Local Township Police
- On-duty police officer in an outlying suburb
- Director of a program for batterers

Paragraph 42 and 43. In a dissertation proposal, just as in a funded proposal, there should be no surprises; it should flow logically, unfolding with additional details of what has been anticipated in the foregoing. This is a surprise and one that has involved a significant amount of work. It deserves better than to be an add-on to an appendix. Interviewing those in the social network that surrounds batterers and who therefore have both a perception of them and some knowledge of how they perceive themselves is an excellent idea. Further, including it in the body of the proposal would have strengthened it.

Placed in what was obviously a section that was written after the proposal was constructed, it probably did little harm in this instance, nor might it in any dissertation proposal. But in a project submitted for funding, where the proposal is usually all that informs reviewers about the applicant, the proposal should be an integrated package without unanticipated add-ons like this.

Related Readings

44. In addition to successfully completing my comprehensive exams, and my initial literature review on treatment programs for men who batter, I have also continued to read materials that apply in a more broad sense to my topic area. Recent books have included the following.

Domestic Violence and Control by Jan E. Stets (a qualitative dissertation turned into a book that interviewed couples involved in domestic violence)

Violent Transactions, edited by Anne Campbell

Domestic Tyranny by Elizabeth Pleck

The Male Batterer: A Treatment Approach by Sonkin, Martin, & Walker

Child Abuser: A Study of Child Abusers in Self-help Group Therapy by M. Collins

Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence by Linda Gordon

Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History by Carol and Peter Stearns

Social Psychology of Aggression: From Individual Behavior to Social Interaction edited by Amelie Mummendey

The Domestic Assault of Women: Psychological and Criminal Justice Perspectives by Donald Dutton

Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems edited by Joel Best

Paragraph 44. The first entry is annotated. That good idea isn't carried through with the rest. Annotation isn't necessary by any means, but it is likely that not more than one or two, if any, of the reviewers will be experts about a specialized problem. Therefore, a set of readings, especially if it includes recently published material, is not likely to be familiar to them. Providing annotations is a courtesy that is likely to be appreciated and make the reader more favorable toward the proposal. And more than that, they indicate a familiarity with the literature, not just knowledge of the right titles to cite. If they include opinions about the quality of the entry in some way, they contribute to the perception of the proposer as a scholar. After all, that is one of the main characteristics that the proposal is intended to convey, and one on which the reviewers are continually making judgments as they read through it. Here is a way to contribute positively to it.

Protection of Subjects

Paragraphs 45–52. Although ethical questions are addressed in the body of the proposal, this is the section dealing with it most completely. Ethics is another of the essential topics. Note also the comment made earlier on paragraph 13.

Approval by a human-subjects review board is mandatory for federally funded projects, but most universities require it of any research by faculty and students involving humans (or by a similar board for animal research). Since this is such a critical aspect of this project where considerable harm to the participants could result if not carried out properly, further discussion of this aspect as done here is particularly apropos. However, the essential material could have been included as part of the proposal and been less redundant. It appears as though the proposer included the statement sent to the human-subjects review board verbatim. Material such as that in paragraph 48 with regard to the security of the data and 50 regarding the risk to participants and the problem posed by inadvertent knowledge of threats to potential victims properly belongs in the proposal; they are important topics. There are also details here (e.g., one—to two-hour audiotaped interviews later destroyed) that belong there as well.

45. In keeping with university regulations, the research plan for this study "The Change Process in Men Who Batter Women" was submitted to the Syracuse University Human Subjects Review Board. The proposal has been approved and permission to continue the research has been granted.

46. The study will adopt a qualitative, symbolic interactionist approach in its examination of the subjective world of the men who batter. I will use interviews with the various cooperating program coordinators and participant observation at counseling/reeducation group sessions (when access is granted), but the bulk of the data will be gathered through completely voluntary in-depth interviews with both current men's treatment program participants and formerly involved "graduates" from several batterers treatment programs located in the State of New York. I will ask the subjects to participate in a short phone interview, which will be followed up by a 1–2 hour audio-taped face-to-face interview.

47. None of the subjects are to be identified in the data collection. The security of the data is to be supervised by the principal investigator throughout the course of the research. The tapes and field notes gathered during the course of the research will be kept in a securely locked metal cabinet. All written materials resulting from the research will disguise the identity of the subjects and the location of the interview. After successful transcription, the original audio tapes will be destroyed. The field notes, stripped of any identifying information, will remain in the custody of the researcher. None of the interview data or documentation will include identification of the subjects. The data is not likely to be of use to courts in the case of legal prosecution, since it identifies information about the man's attempts to cease his abuse rather than information about the man's incidence of abuse.

48. The sample of reforming batterers will be derived from personal contacts the investigator develops with program participants he meets and from a phone survey of batterers listed in the cooperating programs' records as having attended the program 6–18 months ago. A letter introducing the survey and the right of refusal will be sent from the batterers' former counselors to those to be surveyed. A self-addressed postcard will be provided to indicate that the man does not want to be contacted in any way.

49. Perhaps the primary risk for the subjects posed by the research is the possibility of embarrassment or loss due to a public or private breach of confidentiality. In addition, the subject may consider it an intrusion of privacy to be contacted about the research in the first place. The subject may also experience some temporary discomfort when asked to discuss troubling personal experiences. It is highly unlikely, however, that any of the men's confidentiality would be threatened in any way. The exception would be if a subject mentions that he has battered someone immediately prior to attending the interview or that he intends to harm someone directly after an interview. While confidentiality is important, the subject's victim also needs to be protected from potential harm. In the unlikely event that a life-threatening situation appears, the subject would first be encouraged to obtain the appropriate help for himself and victim. This might entail the subject's setting up a counseling ap-

pointment with a staff program member and assuring that his victim receives shelter aid. If he is totally unresponsive, the interviewer would consult the program staff about the proper steps to warn the victim of imminent danger.

50. The men who participate in this study may not benefit directly from the research, other than that they will have a chance to talk with someone interested in what they have to say, and they may feel reinforcement for their efforts to curb their abuse. Articles and publications resulting from the study may indirectly lead to changes and improvement in treatment program practices. Men who batter are participating in an activity that is dangerous to both their partner *and themselves*. The information gathered in interviews with men who have been successful in ending their physical violence may be very useful for men who are currently battering and want to change their behavior.

51. Domestic violence is a well-documented and costly social problem. Treatment and reeducation programs for men are proliferating to address this problem. A significant amount of time and resources is being devoted to efforts to curb and eliminate this form of violence, and yet little research has been done on the efforts of perpetrators to end their abuse. This research should help develop a theoretical model of the change process that may lead to improved program practices and subsequently reduced levels of violence and abuse in the home.

52. The risks posed to subjects of this research is minimal. The subjects are all healthy, informed, consenting adults, and the research is very unlikely to harm them in any way. The potential fruits of the research, however, may be great, and may help reduce the level of violence in our society by providing us with new tools and perspectives on eliminating abuse in the home.

Other Support

Paragraphs 53 to end. Every reviewer is concerned that good projects be carried to conclusion. Lack of adequate resources is probably the most common cause of many graduate students leaving the institution ABD but with firm intentions of completing the dissertation on the new job—we all know horror stories about that. Thus, it is good to see the many pathways to funding this student is trying. In a way, this is an implicit appeal for help; should any of the reviewers know people involved in these various agencies, they could put in a good word, and an impressive proposal such as this might well lead to such an action. Excellent strategy on the part of this student!

53. I am prepared to do the bulk of my data processing on my own Macintosh personal computer. I hope to be able to borrow a university owned cassette tape transcription machine to assist me with the transcription process.

54. In terms of financial support, I intend to apply for a Graduate Student Research Grant from the Graduate School here at Syracuse University. I have been told that the grants will be given primarily to support summer research projects and are likely to have a maximum award of \$1500. Although I was told to expect a Jan-

uary 30th deadline for proposals, the release of an official RFP has not yet occurred. If a grant was awarded to me, it would most likely start June 1, 1991.

55. I will also apply to the Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts at Syracuse University for a small graduate research grant to pay for a software package to assist me in the management of qualitative data, to pay for materials such as blank tapes, and to provide a small amount of money for travel and postage. In the past, grants have ranged from \$300–1500 for graduate students. The requests are handled individually, and I will apply in time to get an answer in May of this year.

56. I am also exploring the possibility of applying for a National Institute of Justice fellowship for dissertation support in policy-relevant areas of criminal justice. The maximum award is \$11,000, which would provide for a stipend of no more than \$5000, major project costs and certain university fees. In the past, the deadline has been March 1, although I was told in a call on 1/7/91 that the RFP has not yet been released. I will continue to contact them and will apply if my work seems to fit within their guidelines.

57. Currently I am funded as a Graduate Assistant in charge of the Campus Mediation Center. This position will only be funded through May of 1991. After that, I will rely as necessary on my part-time job (approx. 6 hrs./week) as a facilitator with a local batterers treatment program.

58. The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation clearly represents my best hope for primary funding for this research project. I feel that my work on men's violence fits well within the mission of the Foundation, and I certainly would be honored to be chosen for such a prestigious award.

Supplementary Supporting Material

59. Attached are two issues (Vol. 5, No. 4 and Vol. 6, No. 2) of the *Ending Men's Violence Newsletter* that were edited by the applicant. The purpose of including them is to give the selection committee a greater familiarity with both the editorial ability and some of the values and beliefs espoused by the applicant.

Final comment. Notice what this student has done—this proposal is presented for approval by his committee, yes, but it is much more than that. The student, almost aggressively (but not overtly, only very subtly so), is working to convert the reviewers to his side—nay, more than that:

- to win them over to the point of view that he is an unusual student with special capabilities and values (paragraph 59),
- with special expertise in the area in which he plans to work,
- with a mission, but with the capabilities to make science paramount in pursuing it,
- as one who had done everything possible to make the dissertation a success and therefore as a student especially deserving of their active support. Nice job!

But he was not only looking for support from his doctoral committee, his project was also funded. We wrote Bill Warters for information about this. He replied as follows: "[T]he dissertation was funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation on the basis of my proposal. I found their name through searching PRISM on-line at Syracuse [in a] . . . category . . . specifically for doctoral research. I approached them directly by phone after having read up on their previous grant-making activities. With minimal direction other than what I found in the application materials, I wrote the proposal that you have now annotated" (Warters, 1994).

Note his process:

1. Checking a database of potential funders (PRISM is a program that allows the user to search data files such as that of the Office of Sponsored Research at Syracuse, which keeps track of funding opportunities. Look for a similar service at your institution!).
2. Having found a likely prospect, he did his homework, finding out what they had funded to see whether his fit.
3. He contacted them by phone to discuss the appropriateness of his proposal and learn how to present it.
4. He wrote the proposal.

Bill was a graduate student at that time, just as are many of you reading this. It took little extra work, gave him experience in working with a foundation and writing a proposal for them, netted him the funding for his work (it is always easier and you do better work when you have funding to help you survive), and learned to manage a project's funding—superb experience for a future faculty member, which he now is. "If the shoe fits," go thou and do likewise!