Forms of Resistance
A study of understandings regarding intimate partner violence among women in Ethiopia

Maria Hägglund
Scientific theory and method, SEL 62, 20 hp, Ss 2012
Supervisor: Johan Gärde
Examiner: Anders Kassman
Acknowledgements
Thank you SIDA for granting me the Minor Field Studies scholarship, making it possible for me to conduct my study in Ethiopia.

Thank you to the women’s centers in Addis Ababa and Awassa, and to the Network of Ethiopian Women’s Association (NEWA), Association for Women’s Sanctuary and Development (AWSAD) and the Ethiopian Women’s Lawyers Association (EWLA) for participating in my study.

Thank you to my dear friend Matilda Johansson who I shared this amazing journey with. I am so grateful for discovering all of this together with you, and for our shared adventures both in Ethiopia and in Senegal.

I also want to thank my supervisor Johan Gärde, as well as my family and friends who have been so supportive during my writing process.

Most of all I want to thank the courageous women who shared their stories with me, and whose experiences, both of violence and of resistance to violence, I try to do justice with this essay.
Abstract
Of all the countries studied in the large-scale WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women (2005), Ethiopian women had the highest numbers of acceptance of intimate partner violence. And according to previous research on the subject, Ethiopian women have a high tolerance for and acceptance of the violence they endure. Yet when I interviewed women in Ethiopia (all of whom had been victims of violence) I discovered multiple forms of resistance to—rather than acceptance of—violence. Rather than confirming how women come to accept violence, my study uncovers many ways in which women resist violence, even in contexts where the available means of resistance are extremely limited.

The aim of my inductive study is to begin to do justice to these forms of resistance, which are easily overlooked. First, as I argue in the analyses of my interviews with the women, our ability to discern forms of resistance in situations of intimate partner violence requires a more capacious notion of resistance than the one usually employed. Second, as I argue through my engagement with the previous research and the analyses of my interviews with women’s organizations in Ethiopia, the inability to discern multiple and varied forms of resistance leads one to underestimate the degree of non-acceptance and active resistance in situations of intimate partner violence. Thus, while my limited study does not permit general conclusions about violence against women in Ethiopia, I conclude by suggesting that my findings have two important implications for social work, one theoretical and one practical.

Key words: Ethiopia, Sub Sahara Africa, Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, violence against women, resistance, resistance to violence, MFS, minor field study
Table of contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 5
Purpose .................................................................................................................................................. 6
Research questions ............................................................................................................................... 6
Intimate Partner Violence ..................................................................................................................... 6
Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 7
Literature search ................................................................................................................................. 7
Research approach .............................................................................................................................. 7
Ethical considerations .......................................................................................................................... 8
Reliability and Validity .......................................................................................................................... 10
Delimitations ......................................................................................................................................... 11
Respondents ......................................................................................................................................... 11
The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence ...................................................... 11
The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence .............................................. 13
Previous research ............................................................................................................................... 15
Theoretical frame of reference ............................................................................................................. 18
Findings and analyses .......................................................................................................................... 20
Part One: Evaluations of intimate partner violence ........................................................................... 20
  The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence ................................................ 20
  The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence ........................................ 24
  Analysis ............................................................................................................................................. 26
Part Two: Evaluations of sexual intimate partner violence ................................................................. 26
  The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence ................................................ 27
  The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence ........................................ 28
  Analysis ............................................................................................................................................. 29
Part Three: Forms of resistance to violence ....................................................................................... 29
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 33
References ........................................................................................................................................... 35
Appendix 1: Letter of consent ............................................................................................................ 36
Appendix 2: .......................................................................................................................................... 37
  Interview guide 1: The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence .......... 37
Appendix 3: .......................................................................................................................................... 40
  Interview guide 2: The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence .40
Introduction
In the spring of 2012, I traveled to Ethiopia to undertake a Minor Field Study, sponsored by SIDA (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The scholarship enabled me to stay in Ethiopia for eight weeks, in March, April and May 2012. I knew before I arrived that I wanted to investigate how violence against women in Ethiopia is evaluated and addressed, but the nature of my investigation changed as I interviewed Ethiopian women who had been victims of violence, as well as representatives of organizations working to prevent violence against women in Ethiopia. Based on the previous research—as well as the information I received from women’s organizations in Ethiopia—I expected that the women who had been subjected to violence would tend to view the violence as “normal” and inevitable. According to the large-scale *WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005), Ethiopian women have the highest numbers of acceptance of intimate partner violence. Similarly, the previous research on the subject underlines that Ethiopian women have a high tolerance for and acceptance of the violence they endure. Yet when I interviewed women in Ethiopia (all of whom had been victims of violence) I was struck by their resistance to—rather than acceptance of—violence. Thus, while I set out to investigate how violence against women is evaluated and addressed in a cultural context where such violence is largely accepted, my own findings led me in a different direction. Rather than confirming how women accept violence in contexts where it is almost ubiquitous and nearly inevitable, I came to discover the many ways in which women resist violence in such contexts, even when the available means of resistance are extremely limited.

Problem statement
According to the *WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005), 71 percent of the female population in Ethiopia is estimated to experience intimate partner violence during the course of their life time. Furthermore, Ethiopian women are the most likely to justify reasons for men to use violence against women, and the least likely to think that women have the right to say no to sex if married. Domestic violence is prohibited by law in Ethiopia, but there are no laws against marital rape. However, 88% of women living in rural areas and 65% of women living in urban areas do not know that there are laws against intimate partner violence.

In a context where violence against women is frequent and apparently a normalized part of women’s life experiences, it becomes important to understand the responses and resistances to intimate partner violence in order to address the problem. With this essay I want to contribute to the understanding of “forms of resistance” in situations of intimate partner violence, primarily among women who have personal experiences of such violence.
**Purpose**
The purpose of this essay is to examine how women who have experienced intimate partner violence evaluate and seek to resist said violence. Specifically, I seek to explore the “forms of resistance” that are at work even in a situation that offers very limited social, political, and personal possibilities to resist violence. I explore forms of resistance that consist in various forms of responses to violence and forms of resistance that consist in how violence is evaluated.

**Research questions**
How do women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence evaluate the violence to which they are subjected?
How do women with experiences of sexual intimate partner violence evaluate the violence to which they are subjected?
How do the women respond to intimate partner violence and/or sexual intimate partner violence?

**Intimate Partner Violence**
The issue of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is wide-ranging. In the following, I will explore specific manifestations of IPV in an Ethiopian context. However, it is useful to bear in mind the general definition of IPV, which comprises physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. There are four main types of intimate partner violence (Saltzman et al. 2002): 1) Physical violence, defined as the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm. 2) Sexual violence, divided into three categories: a) use of physical force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act against his or her will, whether or not the act is completed. b) attempted or completed sexual act involving a person who is unable to understand the nature or condition of the act, to decline participation, or to communicate unwillingness to engage in the sexual act. c) abusive sexual contact. 3) Threats of physical or sexual violence, defined as the use of words, gestures, or weapons to communicate the intent to cause death, disability, injury, or physical harm. 4) Psychological/emotional violence, defined as trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts, or coercive tactics.
Methodology
Below I present my methodological approach and considerations under five separate headings, and introduce my interview respondents.

Literature search
I pursued the literature search for previous research—as well as for material relevant to my theoretical framework—through systematic searches on the Internet and various databases, mainly Google but also Google Scholar. The key words I employed to find information concerning the research field were the following: intimate partner violence, intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, sexual violence in Ethiopia, attitudes toward sexual violence in Ethiopia, violence against women in Ethiopia, attitudes toward violence against women in Ethiopia, attitudes toward sexual violence in Ethiopia, perceptions of intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, evaluations of intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, responses to intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, domestic rape in Ethiopia, violence against women in sub-Saharan Africa, intimate partner violence in sub-Saharan Africa, perceptions and attitudes towards intimate partner violence in sub-Saharan Africa, etcetera.

To find material and research relevant for the theoretical investigation intimate partner violence I employed the following keywords: agency in intimate partner violence, agency in violent relationships, resistance to intimate partner violence, theories of agency, coping strategies, domestic violence, etcetera.

Thanks to these initial searches I was able to gather information relevant for the thesis, including statistical surveys regarding intimate partner violence in Ethiopia, previous research on prevalent Ethiopian attitudes toward such violence, and the theoretical debates concerning the dynamics of intimate partner violence, which led me to discover the response-based approach (developed by Alan Wade) that became central to my study.

Research approach
I chose to pursue an inductive study with a qualitative approach. Following an established method in qualitative research, I undertook interviews in order to collect empirical data. As Dalen (2007) emphasizes, the qualitative interview is a suitable method to employ when one seeks to investigate thoughts, experiences, and desires regarding a given subject (Dalen, 2007, p. 9). Since my aim was to learn more about the attitudes toward violence against women in Ethiopia, I used qualitative interviews as my main method for collecting data. I did both individual interviews and focus groups, which are interviews where a group of informants are given the chance to answer and discuss questions that are relevant for them (Bryman, 2008, p. 127). The interviews were semi-structured interviews which allow for questions that are more flexible and provide the respondent with a greater degree of freedom to give answers that he or she is comfortable with. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher is also
given the opportunity to ask questions that are not part of the interview guide but address subjects that the respondent puts forth (Bryman, 2008, p. 301-304).

On site in Ethiopia, I visited different women’s organization and women’s centers, interviewing both women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence and women working with the issue of intimate partner violence. I conducted ten in-depth semi structured interviews with women about their own experiences and perceptions on intimate partner violence. Seven of the interviews were with women taking part in a sewing- and broidery education at a women’s center in Addis Ababa, which is the capital of Ethiopia. Three of the interviews were conducted at a women’s education center in Awassa, one of Ethiopia’s larger cities, located in the southern part of the country. Many of the women coming to the two centers had migrated from rural areas to the cities due to poverty and had supported themselves as sex workers in the cities. I also interviewed three representatives from women’s organization in Addis Ababa. The organizations address different aspects of gender-based violence, of which intimate partner violence is one. I also conducted two focus groups discussions, one with the personnel working at the center in Addis Ababa and one with gender students at the Addis Ababa University. The interviews with the women at the centers were done with a translator and the other interviews were conducted in English. Of the material gathered, I chose to use the three interviews with the women’s organizations and five of the ten interviews with the women at the centers. I excluded five of the interviews, all of which were conducted at the Addis Ababa center, because I felt uncertain about whether the women interviewed had been given the correct information prior to the interviews and I couldn’t be sure if they felt comfortable being interviewed. This was mostly a result of inadequate communication between me and the woman in charge of the center. I also choose not to include the focus group interviews since I assessed the empirical material needed for a bachelor essay sufficient even without them.

Ethical considerations
In preparation for my research, I consulted the publication of Vetenskapsrådet, God forskningssed by Gustafsson, Herméren, and Pettersson (2011), which provides important instructions for how to conduct research based on ethical values and respect for the respondents that participate in a given study. I also read and observed the Swedish law concerning ethics for research that involves human beings (2003:460). Furthermore, I followed the Swedish ethical council’s consent-, confidentiality-, use and information request by making sure that each person interviewed signed a consent form that describes the overall nature of the research. The interviewees were assured that they would be allowed to remain anonymous, that their participation was voluntary, that they had the permission to retract their participation in the research at any moment and that the information they had provided to the study would then be deleted if they so wished. I wrote the consent form in English and had it translated to Amaharic (the language of the women interviewed). However, several of the women could not read,
so the translator read the consent form to them and made sure that they agreed with the terms provided before they signed the form. In the interviews with the women who had been victims of violence I relied on a translator, since the women did not speak English, whereas the interviews with representatives of the women’s organizations were conducted directly in English. At the women’s center in Addis Ababa I worked with a professional translator, whereas in Awassa I worked with a woman who wasn’t a translator, but who was recommended to me by one of my contacts at the center there. Although the woman who translated for me in Awassa wasn’t a professional, the interviews conducted there seemed to me to be very accurately translated when I transcribed my interviews, whereas several of the interviews in Addis Ababa seemed less accurately translated. That was one reason why I excluded several of the interviews from Addis Ababa in my study. But the main reason I was selective when it came to the material gathered at the Addis Ababa center was that several of the respondents weren’t given enough information before the interviews. In the weeks before conducting my interviews I had several discussions with the woman running the center, and we decided that she was going to talk to some of the women at the center about participating in the study and explain the aim of the study etcetera. Since the subject of the interviews was sensitive and also very personal, we agreed that it was better that she, who had a relationship with the women at the center, asked them if they were willing to be interviewed. When meeting some of the women for interviews it became clear to me that they had not received sufficient information about why they were there and I wasn’t sure if they were comfortable with being interviewed or if they felt obliged to participate. The empirical material included in this study is only from the interviews where I had a dialogue with the respondents in which I felt certain that they wanted to participate and that they came to the interviews with an understanding of the nature of the study.

Out of respect for the privacy of the interviewees, I have chosen to keep all the names of the women anonymous (including the names of the ones working for women’s organizations, which are only indicated by the name of the organization). I’ve chosen not to include the names of the centers where I conducted the interviews, since several of the women I met at the center in Addis Ababa were reluctant to participate in the interviews if there was any risk of people finding out who they were or which organizations they were associated with. There had been an incident a few years back with a journalist interviewing women at the center with the promise of anonymity. The journalist then published the article in a local paper with the center’s name and the names of the women interviewed, which had negative consequences for the women participating in the article. Since the Addis Ababa center had to be anonymous in order for me to conduct my interviews, I chose to keep both centers anonymous when presenting my results.

A pressing ethical concern with regard to my research is the fact that I come from a different culture, with a social and economic background that is extremely privileged in comparison with the socioeconomic background of the women I interviewed. Accordingly, there is a risk of imposing standards and perspectives that fail to do justice to the cultural background of the interviewees, as well
as a risk of alienating the participants and/or making them feel that the interview situation is not a safe or trustworthy environment for them. To preempt a sense of alienation, I began the interviews by emphasizing for the women that I was there because I wanted to learn about their perspective and their experiences, in order to understand their situation better. I also told the women about my work in Sweden, at a center that helps women who are victims of intimate partner violence and that I wanted to learn about this issue in an Ethiopian context, on the basis of their perspectives. My questions were designed to allow the women to articulate their experiences and values in their own way, rather than impose a normative or cultural standard. For several of the women, it was the first time they had the opportunity to tell anyone about deeply traumatic experiences and many of the women testified to how valuable it was to have the chance to narrate what they had been going through. The attempt to do justice to their own voices informed my choice of a response-based approach in the analysis of the results of my study.

Reliability and Validity

The categories of reliability and validity are controversial with regard to qualitative research (see Bryman 2008). The categories are more directly suited for quantitative research and require careful adaptation with regard to qualitative research. I will here account for my research in terms of the four different categories of reliability and validity that Lecompte and Goetz put forth in Bryman (2008). The first category is external reliability, which concerns the degree to which the study is possible to replicate for other researchers. If one were to follow my interview guide, it is very likely that one would receive similar answers from the women. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the dynamic of an interview situation unfolds in a complex and mutable social environment, where many factors come into play. The fact that I am a woman with many years of experience working with women who are victims of violence probably made it easier for me to gain the trust of the interviewees and anyone who tried to replicate the study would have to be careful to make sure that the women felt safe and at liberty to speak their mind in the interview situation.

The second category is internal reliability, which highlights the potential problem that different members of the same research team can have different interpretations of the same events, which raises questions about the internal reliability of the results. Given that I was the only member of my research team, internal reliability is not an issue for my study. The third category is internal validity, which requires that there be a proper correlation between the phenomena that a researcher observes and the theories that he or she employs and develops. My study has a strong internal validity, since I began by paying close attention to the phenomena (what the women said and what I learned about their situation by living in Ethiopia) and only subsequently found a theory (Wade’s response-based approach) that could do justice to what I had observed in my interviews with the women. Finally, the fourth criterion is external validity, which concerns the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized to a
larger population or to other social circumstances. While one needs to be careful in assessing the external validity of my study, since the numbers of empirical cases I examine are quite limited, I conclude by suggesting that my study does have two general implications for social work, which potentially strengthens the external validity of my findings and analyses in this study.

**Delimitations**
The women interviewed about their own experiences of intimate partner violence all come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, their life opportunities being limited by poverty and a lack of education. The findings cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. Ethiopia is a diverse country with a wide range of languages, religions, and cultures which can be of importance to how violence against women is perceived. The women participating in the study come from different parts of the country and have different religious backgrounds. Their diverse geographical and religious backgrounds are however not part of my analysis in this essay. Several of the women also linked their experiences of intimate partner violence with their experiences of harmful traditional practices, such as early marriages and abductions (Pickup et al., 2001, p 78-80). Although these experiences are of importance to the understandings of violence against women, in this essay I will focus specifically on understandings of intimate partner violence.

**Respondents**
The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence

The majority of the women I met at both of the women´s centers had migrated to the cities of Awassa and Addis Ababa from rural areas due to poverty and limited opportunities to support themselves, and often time to escape violence from their families and partners. When coming to the cities many of the women supported themselves through sex work, and for them the education at the women´s centers created a possibility to find other ways of supporting themselves and their children. Several of the women were HIV positive, and had contracted the virus while selling sex. I interviewed the women about their experiences and understandings regarding intimate partner violence, and below I present the respondents´ backgrounds and the relationships in which they were subjected to intimate partner violence. I refer to the respondents with the initial of their first names in order to protect their anonymity. Of the five respondents, only T is still living with the man who is subjecting her to psychological, physical and sexual violence. H is widowed, and B, E and N have been able to leave the violent relationships that they discuss in the empirical results of this essay.

B

B grew up in the region of Wellega, in a family where her father was violent against her mother. She says that the violence in her family forced her to move out of the house at the age of fifteen. She then
moved from the countryside to the city of Awassa, where she supported herself through sex work before meeting her husband. B got married to her husband around the age of twenty and is now divorced. She was married to her husband for four years and they have two children together. Her husband was psychologically and physically violent to her during their marriage. B divorced him because of the violence, but says that it is very difficult for a woman to be divorced and that it is hard for her to provide for herself and her children.

H
H comes from the region of Wellega. Her mother died when she was born, and H grew up living with relatives. At the age of thirteen she didn’t have anyone to support her, and she left the countryside to find work in the city of Awassa. In Awassa she was able to support herself through housework and other domestic services. In order to get work she had contact with different job traders in Awassa. One of these men raped her and she got pregnant. H felt she didn’t have any other choice but to marry him. She was fourteen at the time, and he was much older. After three years of marriage she left him and took her child with her. Soon after that she married her second husband who is now deceased. H says that in contrast to her first marriage, she had romantic feelings for her second husband and wanted to marry him. But once they were married her husband became psychologically and physically violent to her, and she says that he also treated her like a domestic worker and that he was constantly cheating on her. She also contracted the HIV virus from her second husband. H says that her first husband was good in comparison to her second husband. In the empirical results of this essay, H is discussing her experiences with her second husband only.

T
T grew up in the region of Tigray. Her mother died when she was a child and she was raised by her stepfather. T was abducted into an early marriage at the age of thirteen. The man she came to marry is about ten years older than her, and he tried on multiple occasions to persuade both T and her stepfather to let him marry her. After being turned down several times, he abducted T and took her to the army soldier camp where he was living. He raped her there, and after that T says she felt that there was nothing she could do but to stay with him. T says that when a girl is abducted by a man into a relationship there is no official legal ceremony but it is still considered a marriage and she refers to him as her husband. T came to Awassa when her husband, who is a soldier in the Ethiopian army, was transferred there. She has had three children, two of which she has given up for adoption. T is constantly subjected to psychological and physical violence by her husband, but she says that she has limited possibilities to leave the relationship since it is difficult for her to provide for herself and her child on her own.
E
E grew up in the region of Arsi in a home where her father was violent towards her mother. When her father left their family, it became difficult for her mother to support the children and E had to start working at an early age to help her mother and siblings. When E was around the age of seventeen, she was pursued by a man in his sixties who offered to help her out financially. E turned down his advances but felt that she had to accept the money in order to help her family. Later the same year this man abducted her and took her to another part of the region where she then lived with him for a few years. He was psychologically and physically violent towards her during these years. E managed to escape the relationship during a visit to the man´s brother. She went by herself to the brother and then refused to go back home. She says the brother felt compassion for her and convinced the man to let her go back home to her mother. E says that she was happy to be back home, but that it was difficult for her to make a living and she had to turn to sex work in order to support herself. She eventually moved to Addis Ababa where she got involved with an evangelical church. Today she is remarried and living in a non-violent marriage. She and her husband are expecting their second child. In the empirical results of this essay, E is discussing her experiences with the man who abducted her, not her current husband.

N
N comes from the region of Wellega. Her mother died when N was around three years old, leaving N with her father who soon remarried. N says her stepmother treated her very badly and was violent towards her. N was married away at the age of seven, forcing her to leave her family and go live with her husband who at the time was around eighteen years old. The marriage had been arranged by her and her husband´s families when she was born. N says that these marriages are tradition when you grow up in the country side, and that once she was married there was little her father could do to protect her against the violence her husband inflicted on her. She lived with her husband for four years, and during these years she fled her husband´s house several times trying to get help from her father, but she was repeatedly forced to go back. On one occasion she set fire to her husband´s house, and after that she was finally allowed to go back living with her father and his family. But her stepmother continued to beat her and mistreat her and N decided to leave at the age of fifteen to come to Addis Ababa where she has supported herself through domestic work and sex work.

The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence
I interviewed three representatives from three different women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence. In the empirical material the representatives interviewed are referred to with the abbreviations of the name of their organization. Even though the individuals interviewed also
express personal opinions, in this material they first and foremost represent the organizations they work for.

NEWA
NEWA is a non-partisan and non-governmental organization established in 2003. NEWA strives to create conditions for Economic, Social, Political, and Legal empowerment for women in Ethiopia. Specifically, they have launched a vigorous public campaign of Promotion, Advocacy, and Lobbying for women’s rights. Through their public campaigns, they also seek to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women in Ethiopia.

AWSAD
Association for Women´s Sanctuary and Development, www.awsad.org.
AWSAD is an Ethiopian Resident Charity Association established to advance women’s social and economic development and provide support for women and girls who have faced physical and psychological harm. AWSAD is also hosting a safe house for women who have been victims of physical and psychological violence.

EWLA
Ethiopian Women´s Lawyers Association, blog.world-citizenship.org.
EWLA is non-profit and nonpartisan voluntary organization founded by a group of Ethiopian women lawyers in 1995. EWLA’s mission is to promote the economic, social, political, and legal rights of women and to that end assist them to secure full protection of their rights under the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and other international human rights conventions. EWLA also specializes in giving legal representation for women who have been victims of violence and seeks to promote public awareness of the issue of violence against women.
Previous research
My survey of previous research focused on studies that address violence against women in Ethiopia, as well as studies that specifically address the question of how violence against women is perceived and evaluated in Ethiopia. The studies and articles I discuss below are representative of the prevalent views and findings in the previous research.

The WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women (2005), is based on surveys and interviews with 24,000 women in ten different countries. The countries included in the study are Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania. The study showed intimate partner violence being widespread in all the countries, with the highest numbers in Ethiopia. The prevalence of physical violence and/or sexual violence in an intimate partner relationship of ever-partnered women ranged from 13 percent in Japan to 71 percent in Ethiopia. The prevalence of sexual violence in an intimate partner relationship of ever-partnered women ranged from 6 percent in Japan to 59 percent in Ethiopia.

The study also investigated women’s attitudes regarding physical and sexual violence, asking the women participating in the study under which circumstances men are justified in using violence against their wives and whether and when a woman has the right to say no to sex with her husband. Ethiopian women had the highest numbers of acceptance of physical and sexual violence. The study lists the following reasons that women say justify intimate partner violence; 1) wife does not complete housework, 2) wife disobeys her husband, 3) wife refuses sex, 4) wife asks about other women, 5) husband suspects infidelity, 6) wife is unfaithful. 94 percent of the Ethiopian women who themselves had experienced violence agreed that at least one of the listed reasons justified intimate partner violence. 89.4 percent of the Ethiopian women who had not experienced violence agreed with at least one of the listed reasons. In all countries, the acceptance of violence was higher among women who themselves had experienced violence, and the study concludes that this can be understood as women who are victims of violence learn to accept violence and that women who normalize violence are more likely to be in a violent relationship. The study lists the following reasons for when it is acceptable for women to say no to sex with their husbands; 1) she does not want to, 2) he is drunk, 3) she is sick, 4) he mistreats her. 35.8 percent of the Ethiopian women agreed with all of the reasons listed and 18.5 percent agreed with none of the reasons listed. Ethiopia had the highest numbers for agreeing with none of the reasons listed among the countries in the study, and among the lowest numbers for agreeing with all the reasons listed.

Berhane, Deyessa, Kaba and Yigzaw (2010) examine perceptions of intimate partner violence among different strata of the Ethiopian population. The participants in the study were women of different age groups, victims and perpetrators of violence and representatives from different professional fields and societal institutions. The conclusion of their study is that people find justifications for violence within relationships and will not deem violence unacceptable if they understand the motives for the violence. Since conflicts are inevitable within marriages, a husband
beating his wife is to be expected. If it is mild and does not result in severe injuries, the violence is often deemed acceptable and condemning it would be denying the reality of what a marriage is. It might not be viewed as right or ideal, but it is acceptable. There was also a notion that violence could be read as a sign of love, that if a man loved his wife he would beat her and that women would recognize the beating as a sign of love. Men were also viewed as disciplinarians of women, with a responsibility to reprimand women for wrongdoings. When these situations occur, a woman deserves to be beaten by her husband, and a man failing to punish his wife is considered unmanly. There were also participants who rejected violence as an acceptable way to solve conflicts within marriages. The women participating in the study who themselves had been subjected to intimate partner violence stated that they felt they should have tolerated their husbands’ violence. The research participants defined sexual violence as forcing a woman to have sex against her will. However, many of the study’s participants didn’t think that rape was possible within the context of marriage, since sexual relations within a marriage is legitimate and spouses are obligated to provide sex to one another. Even those participants stating that having sex with someone without their consent is wrong no matter if it happened within the context of marriage or not, hesitated to label it rape with the argument that the concept of rape does not apply to marriage. The women participating in the study didn’t think that not wanting to have sex was a good enough reason to say no to sex with their husbands, but listed certain valid reasons to say no to sex such as being sick or risking getting pregnant. Many of the participants thought women would rather put up with violence in a marriage than divorce their husbands due to the stigmatization of divorced women and women’s economic dependency on their husbands.

Kedir and Admasachew (2010) explore violence, culture and coping mechanisms through interviews with women with personal experiences of violence, as well as gender experts. The writers argue that Ethiopian society and culture justifies violence against women, referencing statistics showing high numbers of violence against women and the widespread customs of harmful traditional practices. The authors define culture as “a collection of norms, beliefs and societal perceptions regarding the status and roles of women” and argue that culture is directly linked to how women “understand and react to violence”. Within Ethiopian culture, women have a high tolerance and acceptance of the violence they endure. In a society where violence is widespread and justified, women often comply with the perpetrators of violence and often have little space to form opinions against the justifications of violence. Women also often time have no choice but to put up with violence because if she leaves the relationship, she has nowhere to go and no way to support herself financially. The women in the study talked about their limited options as a reason not to be able to escape violence. They also said they lacked support from family and friends who often sided with the perpetrators of the violence. The gender experts emphasized the importance of culture, stating that within Ethiopian culture women are expected to be submissive and that a husband’s violence against his wife is often understood as an expression of love. They also underlined that women’s poverty and lack of education makes it difficult for women to escape violence and to break the cycle of violence.
against women. The women in the study many times expressed loyalty to their abusers and tried to adjust to, and accept, the violence in order to cope with it. The study also found that women had little awareness about their own rights and little knowledge about the institutional support available. The women did not think that they live in a culture that encourages men to be violent, whereas the gender experts interviewed all agreed that this is the case.

The article *For us it’s like living in the dark - Ethiopian women’s experiences with domestic violence* (2005), written by Sullivan, Senturia, Negash, Shiu-Thornton and Giday, discusses the experiences of intimate partner violence among Ethiopian women living in exile in the United States. The women in the study stated that there is no real understanding of intimate partner violence as problematic within the Ethiopian community and that there is a lack of support for women trying to address their experiences of intimate partner violence. The study participants emphasized the importance of women’s rights and gender equality in order to battle the issue of violence against women. The women mostly did not express an acceptance of intimate partner violence, but described a context where there is not much room for resistance.
Theoretical frame of reference
While I conducted my research, I was struck by the discrepancy between how violence against women in Ethiopia was described by the previous research on the subject - as well as by the women’s organizations working in the country - and how it was described by the Ethiopian women I interviewed, in their own accounts of the experience of being victims of violence. Both the previous research and the women’s organizations working in Ethiopia largely described the women as passive and accepting in relation to the violence done to them. In contrast, the women themselves described various forms of resistance to the violence, as well as a greater awareness of the injustice of the violence than ascribed to them by the previous research and the women’s organizations.

How can one account for this discrepancy and for the different ways of understanding the violence in question? In seeking to answer this question, the most illuminating and relevant theoretical framework turned out to be the understanding of personalized violence that has been developed by the Canadian family therapist and researcher, Dr. Allan Wade. Wade’s theories are the foundation of “response-based therapy,” which is an increasingly widespread psychotherapeutic approach for treating psychological trauma that results from intimate partner violence. My focus here will not be on the details of the therapeutic method itself. Rather, I will focus on the theoretical foundations of response-based therapy, first formulated by Wade in his article *Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression* (Wade, 1997). Wade has further elaborated his theory in numerous influential articles, the most important being *Language and Violence: Four Discursive Operations*, co-authored with Linda Coates (Coates & Wade, 2007; see also Coates & Wade, 2004, Todd & Wade, 2003; Wade, 2002).

Wade’s theoretical innovation with regard to the analysis of personalized violence is threefold. First, Wade argues that violence is always accompanied by resistance to violence. As he emphasizes, “whenever individuals are subjected to violence they resist. Alongside each history of violence there runs a parallel history of resistance” (Coates & Wade, 2007 p. 513). Yet the forms of resistance are multiple - and only sometimes take the form of open defiance—so Wade develops a comprehensive notion of resistance to understand the various strategies of defense employed by victims of personalized violence. In Wade’s definition,

any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. (Wade, 1997 p. 25)

Second, Wade identifies “four discursive operations” through which our understanding of personalized violence is distorted. Specifically, he shows how language is frequently used in order to 1) Conceal violence. 2) Obfuscate and reduce the perpetrators’ responsibility. 3) Conceal the victims’ various strategies of resistance. 4) Blame and pathologize the victims. Through detailed analyses, Wade and Coates demonstrate how these four discursive operations are at work in a wide range of the most decisive accounts of personalized violence, from the perpetrators’ own accounts, to the accounts given
by psychiatrists, judges, politicians, and therapists. Thus, Coates and Wade call attention to how the
dominant accounts of personalized violence distort the understanding of both the responsibility of the
perpetrators and the resistance of the victims.

Third, Wade outlines an alternative version of the four discursive operations, which can serve to
clarify - rather than dissimulate - the mechanisms of personalized violence. This discursive operation
consists in 1) Exposing violence by using language that conveys the fact that there is unilateral relation
between perpetrator and victim (rather than a mutual responsibility for what happened). 2) Clarifying
the responsibility for the violence by not portraying the perpetrator as having lost control of himself in
the act of violence, but rather highlighting the deliberate nature of his actions, especially his strategic
efforts to suppress the resistance of the victim. 3) Elucidating and honoring the responses and
resistances of the victim by taking into account the specific responses to acts of violence and
oppression, as well as “elucidating the situational logic by which some responses become intelligible
as forms of resistance” (Coates & Wade, 2007, p. 521, emphasis added). 4) Contest the blaming and
pathologizing of victims by securing accounts of their active resistance, however limited and
circumscribed the possibility of such resistance may be.

As I will show in my analyses, Wade’s theories provide an illuminating framework for my study in
two distinct ways. 1) Wade’s theories enable one to identify strategies of resistance to violence that are
easily overlooked, but which emerge from my interviews with the women. Specifically, Wade
proposes concrete, new ways of identifying violence and the resistance to violence that illuminate the
implications of my interview material. 2) Wade also argues that the victims’ resistance to violence
tends to be overlooked through the discursive language we use to discuss violence. Wade’s theories
can thus shed light on why the women’s organizations working in Ethiopia—as well as the previous
research - in many cases disregard the active resistance of the victims.

I will elaborate 1) and 2) in my Findings and Analyses as well as in my Conclusion, with references
to Wade’s theories.
**Findings and analyses**

This chapter is divided into three parts, corresponding to my three research questions. In the first two parts, I present the results that emerged from my first two research questions, namely, how do women in Ethiopia with personal experiences of intimate partner violence and/or sexual intimate partner violence evaluate the violence to which they are subjected? The first part focuses on intimate partner violence and the second part focuses on sexual intimate partner violence. In both parts, I contrast the accounts given by the women themselves with the accounts given by representatives of the women’s organizations as well as accounts given in the previous research on the subject. As I will argue in my Conclusion, the discrepancy between the respective accounts can be explained drawing on Wade’s theories, but in these first two parts I am careful to restrict my analyses to the data that I collected in the interviews. The third part in turn presents the results that emerged from my third research question, namely, how do the women respond to intimate partner violence and/or sexual intimate partner violence? I here draw on Wade’s theories directly in order to show how the women’s responses testify to multiple “forms of resistance” to violence, thus preparing the way for my conclusion. In the findings, B, H, E and N are discussing experiences of intimate partner violence they had in relationships they are no longer in. Only T is discussing experiences of violence in a relationship she is still in. However, some of the quotes in the text from the women discussing past experiences are still in the present tense. These grammatical errors can be explained by the translator’s adequate, but not fluid, English.

**Part One: Evaluations of intimate partner violence**

Under this heading I explore how the respondents with personal experiences of intimate partner violence evaluate their own experiences of violence, as well as how they evaluate violence against women as a societal phenomenon. Their views and evaluations are contrasted and analyzed in comparison with how the respondents from the different women’s organizations discuss societal values and women’s values concerning violence against women.

The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence

When discussing their experiences of intimate partner violence and whether or not their men had a right to use violence, it wasn’t justifications of violence that the women expressed. Rather, they described their men having the power to use violence, but not the right to do so. Furthermore they described a situation where they had no choice but to endure the violence.

B: He doesn’t have the right but he has force (…) I don’t think he has got the right, he got power and force to do (…) he starts to beat but he hasn’t got the right to do this thing.

H: I don’t believe he’s got right, but he is man, that’s why he tried to do these things, he has force. I don’t have any force to defend myself against him or to beat him (…) he don’t have any right, who gave to him this right?
T: Sometimes I don’t think he has the right, but sometimes I feel he has got the right. If he doesn’t have the right I don’t think he would do these things to me. So sometimes I feel he doesn’t have the right, and sometimes I feel that he does have the right to do this, because he did it.

*Because he did this?*

Yeah. Without having the right, how can he do this thing? So sometimes I think he has the right.

For B and H, the issue of the violence imposed on them is not about a man’s right to use violence. They don’t see any moral justifications for their husbands’ violence against them. Instead they emphasize physical force and say that their husbands were in a position of power that enabled them to use violence. T is more ambivalent regarding her husband’s right to use violence when she says that even though she doesn’t believe him to have the right to use violence, she sometimes feels that he must have the right, because otherwise, how could he do this? The ambivalence that T is expressing could be a reflection of how she is somewhat influenced by a societal discourse that tells her men have a right to use violence, but that she is also resisting that discourse at the same time.

Talking about whether or not her ex-husband had the right to use violence, B explains how the circumstances of her life and their marriage gave him the power to be violent towards her while leaving her with no choice but to stay in the marriage. Coming to Awassa, she didn’t know anyone to turn to for help or support and she says that she didn’t have any way to defend herself or anywhere to turn to for help. She constantly went to the local police office without getting the help that she needed. She says that the government could have helped her but they didn’t, which enabled him to continue to abuse her. The lack of support and her limited resources were what gave him the right to abuse her:

I went to the police people and the government’s people, but they didn’t do anything. So he has right to assault me, to kick me, and he have force to that. I don’t have any force to make him not to do this bad thing, so always I keep silent (...). If the government decides something good for me, he will stop, but no one will do these things for me, that’s the problem. So he has power, and he has force, so he continues to do these things.

Discussing if men think they have a right to use violence towards women, and if so, how they justify it, the women said that men and women think differently about this issue and listed the following reasons to why men think they have a right to use violence: power, money, notions of male superiority, a lack of education and community norms.

B: I think they think they have right to do this because they have got the power and also they want to revenge the women.

T: They don’t think the same about violence, women and men have different thoughts about this. I think that men think that they have the right because they have money.

E: Whenever he wants to, the woman should not refuse him, she should do whatever he wants.

*Why do you think that is?*

Because men are superior…I always thought men were superior.

*Did you think that before or do you think that now?*
Not now.

N: It’s the community, the way they think, this is the norm. It’s the normal way to think for most people in the community.

And do you think, in the countryside, do you think that both men and women have the same ideas about these things?

Yes, it’s not a choice.

N says that opinions on the subject of violence and acceptance of violence don’t vary between men and women since no one really has a choice or the possibility to choose something else. It’s about the norms and the values of the community. According to E, the justification of violence stems from notions of male superiority, and she says that she used to think that way too, that men were superior. Here, N and E argue that there are societal norms and values that make both men and women justify men’s violence. B, H and T, however, argue that women don’t accept men’s violence or believe men have a right to use violence. H says that society is changing and that it’s no longer acceptable for men to be violent against women within marriages or relationships. She says that most women do not view intimate partner violence as a normal part of life. But it happens to women and women try their best to deal with it, but they don’t accept it: “For most of the women, it’s not normal life to live like this, but we try our best to make it good and to make it normal, but it doesn’t happen sometime.”

B and H both say that they mostly don’t blame themselves for their husbands’ violence against them. B says that she sometimes had positive feelings towards him and that she could feel sorry for him, and also that she used to pray to God for him to change. But she says that she always knew that “he is bad” and that what he did was wrong. H says that she mostly didn’t blame herself because she knew she had done nothing wrong and that he would beat her no matter what she did. Her strategy was to apologize to him and ask him to forgive her for her mistakes, but she says she knew she didn’t actually do anything wrong. T however puts blame on herself for her husband’s actions towards her. She also says that women in general tend to blame themselves for violence within marriages, but that women sometimes put the blame on the men - when they realize that the violence isn’t something that they can control or that they can’t change their husbands’ behavior. B thinks that women are often blamed for the violence in a marriage and that people think that if a woman is beaten it is because of something that she did wrong. But this is not always the case, B says. People can also sometimes think that the men are in the wrong for using violence against their wives.

All women agreed that violence against women is very common and that it happens to most women. E says that violence against women is “normal” and N says violence against women is the norm. N relates the issue of intimate partner violence to growing up in the country side. She says that in Ethiopia’s rural areas violence against women is expected and that the reason it prevails is because of a lack of awareness and education. She says she “feels that violence against women will never end, it will only end when we die.” N and T were both married away as children and they both state early
marriages as a reason for violence towards women. T says that she was just a kid when she got married and didn’t know anything about married life. Her husband expected her to know about household chores and being a wife and got angry with her for not knowing how to behave. B and H are unsure of the reasons for men’s violence, but think it might have to do with women talking too much or saying bad things to their husbands. They also state poorly done household work as a possible reason. If the house is not cleaned or the food is not ready when the husband comes home, that might be a reason why he would beat his wife.

Discussing equality between men and women and equality in their own marriages, the women mostly said that men and women should be equal but that they aren’t. But several of the women thought society is changing and that the situation for women has improved. B says that “in my opinion, men and women should have the same right and the same power.” She says men and women should be equal in a marriage because when they get married the house they live in should be theirs together and they should have equal rights when it comes to raising the children and making the decisions about their lives. She says that these things have improved and that:

Nowadays it became the same. Before, it was not the same. The society gave the value for the men only, rather than the women. Everybody see the woman just down, and the men will be more valuable, but now it has become equal.

B sees money as a key factor to gender equality. She says that if a married woman earns her own money she will be able to be on equal terms with her husband. However, she says, women usually don’t have any money of their own which leaves them no choice but to do whatever their husbands want. The husband is the one working and making money, whereas the wife stays at home taking care of the children, which gives the husband the right to lead the household and leaves the wife with few options but to do whatever he wants. B says this is what gave her husband power over her. Since she didn’t have any money of her own, she felt she had no other choice but to obey her husband and to put up with the violence.

Most of the time, I don’t have any money to do something, so if he gives me the money, the decision will be his. It’s because I don’t have any money. But if I have got money, I will decide what to do. In our culture, it’s like that. Most of the time, women don’t have money, or she is home mother, so she doesn’t have any power to decide, because it is his money. He works and he got money. So he wants to do anything he wants. But if she got money, they will come together and they will put together the money and they will decide. Both of them. If he is the one that brings money, he is the one to decide. So I don’t have any chance to do this things, he always have right to decide, because of that.

T, who was abducted and married against her will as a child, says that she didn’t use to know that these things were wrong and that she had rights of her own. But now she knows her rights, she says, and she links her own increased awareness to an overall improvement in women’s rights. She says that society now “give value and respect to women”, and that men no longer have the right to make all of the decisions in a marriage. T does however link these positive changes in gender equality to living in urban areas. In the rural areas, she says, women have no value in the communities, and are merely treated as workers or child bearers by their husbands. N also says that only in urban areas do women
have certain freedoms. In the rural area where she is from, she says, “a woman has no right”. In the
country side, women are expected to work hard and take care of the family. By doing that, she can be
respected in the community, but she has no rights of her own. N says that men are always viewed as
superior, and the idea of male superiority is part of the rural communities’ norms and value systems.

N: Basically, in my experience, men are always superior. That’s how they are viewed upon. Maybe now,
they may have changed a little bit, because they are being educated. But basically men are always
superior by nature. And they know that, because that is just how everything is.

E underlines male superiority as a prevailing societal notion that both men and women accept. She
thinks that women don’t actively do anything to oppose these ideas, but rather passively accept the
values about gender that they are taught by their families and their communities. E says that women
don’t think they can make decisions for themselves and says that “when they say that a man is superior
we just accept it”.

The women’s organizations working against intimate partner violence
All three organizations were in agreement that intimate partner violence against women is prevalent
and the WHO research showing numbers as high as 71 percent of women being affected are accurate.
They were also in agreement that the WHO statistics showing Ethiopian women´s high acceptance
of violence is accurate. NEWA states in regard to the WHO statistics, that women think their husbands
have a right to beat them if they don’t do the household chores or if they use up the money they have
been given by their husbands. Women will justify intimate partner violence with these circumstances.
Intimate partner violence is not seen as a crime, but is instead looked upon from the view point of what
a woman did or did not do in her marriage or to her husband. NEWA says that violence against women
is justified and accepted because there is no understanding of women having rights within themselves,
that the idea of a woman’s individual right is not yet ingrained in the Ethiopian society.

AWSAD says that “I think it’s like a norm, it’s tradition. I think that inside, everyone believes that
man is greater than woman”. AWSAD, as well as NEWA and EWLA, explains women’s high
acceptance of violence as a result of norms and traditions in the Ethiopian society that values men over
women. In her opinion everyone, women as well as men, thinks that men are superior to women. Men
believe they are justified in doing anything to a woman, she says. Even in the young generation.
EWLA states culture and notions of male superiority as the underlying reasons for the widespread
acceptance of men’s violence against women. She says that the prevailing attitude regarding gender
states that men should be in charge of women and women should be serving the men they are married
to. But EWLA also relates women’s acceptance of violence to their limited possibilities in choosing
another life for themselves:

They have reasons not to defend themselves or not to refuse that act. For one thing they are financially
dependent on men, because the majority of Ethiopian women are not working out to gain income and it is
the men who are the breadwinners, so especially after they have children the women think about their
family. If they go out, then they don’t have the means to live by, and the other thing is, if they go out they
think of who is going to take care of the children and if they take the children then there is more
problem…they don’t have a source of income and it will be burdensome to have the children as well.
These things will force the women to live in such violent environments. So, even though, I some cases we
feel that they accept it, they don’t have the means to live outside that violent environment. That is the problem for most of the women that we are consulting.

It can be easy to interpret women staying in violent relationships as an acceptance of violence. But most women that EWLA comes in contact with lack the financial means to leave their marriages or relationships. They are financially dependent on their husbands, and if they leave or divorce their men they will often find themselves without any means to support themselves and their children.

NEWA relates the justifications of violence with a lack of understanding of women’s rights, that women have rights within themselves, as individuals. Married women are viewed as their husbands’ property. In regards to intimate partner violence, women are scrutinized and critiqued for what they might or might not have done towards their husbands. Violence against women is always justified. It is not viewed as a violation of a woman’s rights. There isn’t an understanding that a woman has the right to behave anyway she likes, and that no matter how she behaves there is no justification for violence against her. Even as times are changing and women are working outside of the home, being more financially independent, there is no real change in the understanding of women’s rights, and this is connected to the constant justifications of violence against women. NEWA says, that the justifications of violence isn’t only linked to the reasons mentioned in the WHO report, but that men are justified in using violence against women for any reason. She says that women often equate violence with love, saying that violence is a sign of love and if he doesn’t beat her how will she know that he cares. She also says regarding women’s acceptance of violence that women living in the environment of violence and abuse might think that this is what marriage and relationships are, that they don’t know anything else. NEWA equates what she perceives as cultural norms with norms about masculinity and that these norms of superior masculinity are what need to be changed. The idea of men being superior to women and men being the head of the household is what ultimately justifies intimate partner violence. Both NEWA and AWSAD see the need for a change in gender roles within the family in order to address the issue of intimate partner violence. AWSAD says men think they dishonor themselves and their manhood if they take part in the household work or if they participate hands on in the care taking of their children. NEWA says that if the idea of masculinity as violent is to be changed, the household work and taking care of the children can’t be seen as only woman’s work. She says that marital conflicts often start because of the unequal sharing of household work and the unequal distribution of money in the family, due to the man as the only one working outside the home making money.

The three organizations all think that women blame themselves for men’s violence in intimate relationships. Women lack awareness of their own rights and believe men are justified in using violence. AWSAD says that most women in Ethiopia believe that men have the right to beat their wives, and when a man does beat his wife, nobody will tell him that he is wrong in doing so. She sees some improvement in the attitude towards intimate partner violence in that nowadays people know it is a crime, but there are no guarantees that even the police will enforce the law or support a woman trying to report her husband for beating her. AWSAD also says that women equate violence with
masculinity, thinking a man is not a real man unless he beats her. Men believe they are justified in doing whatever they want to a woman, including killing her.

AWSAD: It’s patriarchal society Ethiopia. We say the man is the head of the household, as is stated in the bible. Our religious leaders are teaching us this. The man must decide in critical issues. Even if the woman is going to work and the man is going to work, even if she generate her own money and have an income, the man is controlling that.

EWLA says that men, or often time the whole community, think that men are entitled to have power over women and that women have an obligation to serve and to satisfy men. Intimate partner violence occurs within that power structure, and there needs to be a focus on women´s rights and women as equals to men in order to change that underlying power structure and challenge the justifications of men´s violence against women.

Analysis
The WHO statistics showing 71 percent of women being subjugated to violence through the course of their lifetime and the statistics showing a high level of acceptance for intimate partner violence among women paints the picture of violence as a normalized part of women´s lives. The question at hand is how women living within this context and experiencing intimate partner violence evaluate men´s violence against women. The previous research accounted for in this essay and the women´s organizations interviewed both underline women´s acceptance of violence and the gender norms and cultural norms that uphold a patriarchal structure. When I interviewed the women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence, I did not however find that they accepted the violence or that they gave reason for when it is acceptable for a man to beat a woman. They knew about their rights, and they also thought men and women should be equal. They also have resisted the violence by for example going to the police or filing for divorce. Rather than acceptance of violence, the women describe a situation where they have no choice but to stay in violent relationships. Even though violence is normalized in society, the women don´t fully accept or internalize those norms. The women´s options are restricted by poverty, family and gender norms, but within that context of limited choices, there is still resistance in thought, approach and action.

Part Two: Evaluations of sexual intimate partner violence
Under this heading I explore how the women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence view their experiences of sex with their husbands or partners. The sexual experiences discussed took place within abusive relationships, and the question at hand is whether or not the women defined their experiences as sexual violence. Their views and evaluations are contrasted and analyzed in comparison with how the respondents from the different women´s organizations discuss societal values and women´s values concerning sexual violence within marriage or relationships.
The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence
All five women said they had had sex against their will, but not all of them defined it as rape. When asked what constitutes rape three of the women said rape is sex forced upon someone with physical violence, while two of the women said rape is sex against someone’s will. T gave the following definition of rape: “Rape to me is sexual intercourse without will. When somebody has sex with me without my will, it’s rape”.

The women described their sexual relations with their husbands or partners as obligatory, with little room for stating their own will or making their own choices. B says that sometimes when her husband was nice to her she didn’t mind having sex with him, but for the most part she didn’t want to sleep with him. She didn’t have the possibility of saying no to sex with him or to decide when they would have sex. She says that he forced her to have sex and that he forced her by beating her. But she didn’t label it as rape.

I don’t want to have sex but he wants to have and he beat me and he does that thing. He has sex with me without my will.
I didn’t think like rape, but just I got bad feeling because he eat outside, he drank outside, he didn’t get any food for me, he didn’t ask what my lunch was, what did you eat, he didn’t ask anything, he wants to have sex with me only. So I got bad feeling for that.

As the quote shows, B clearly defines the sex as involuntary and forced. She is however hesitant to define it as rape. Instead she understands it as a wrongdoing against her because he is inconsiderate of her needs and will use her for sex. When asked if she thinks that rape occurs within marriage she gives a definition of what marital rape would be but doesn’t think it applies to her marriage:

I understand it will be like that sometimes. The woman don’t want to have sex most of the time, but he still wants to have sex and then he does it, I think that will be rape. But for me, I didn’t have that experience because he is my husband.

H says that her husband wanted to have sex constantly, but that she didn’t want to have sex with him. If she tried to say no to sex, he would be upset, accuse her of infidelity and beat her. Just like B, H does recognize that she was forced to have sex, but doesn’t want to define her experiences as rape.

When asked about the right to say no to sex within marriage, she says that she had a right to say no but that it is not a right that she could actually practice in real life:

I have right, but I don’t have right. Because if I say no, I will be beaten, so most of the time I feel I don’t have any right. But I have right, in the real world, I have right, but in reality, when it comes to the reality, I don’t have any rights, because the consequence is bad for me.

T describes her sexual relationship with her husband in a similar way as B and H. She does however define her experiences as rape. She says that she sometimes says no to sex but that he will force her to have sex anyway. Mostly she doesn’t say anything, she keeps quiet and lets him do what he wants to. She says she gets angry with him, because she didn’t marry him out of love. She was abducted into marriage and has never been able to make choices regarding her relationship with her husband. E was also abducted at an early age and lived with her abductor for a while before they started having a sexual relationship. E says she always thought of what he did as rape and that she started hating him after he first raped her. She used to defend herself physically as best as she could but he was much too
strong for her and he would never listen to her when she said no. N was married at the age of seven and forced to have sex with her husband. She defines the sex as rape and says that the sexual violence in her marriage has been very traumatizing for her. She says “there was no choice. Even when I told him no, he still beat me. Even though I refused him, he still beat me”. There was no possibility for N to say no to sex with her husband. She tried to escape by running away or hiding. She sometimes went to her father’s house seeking protection, but in the end she would always have to go back to her husband. Neither her father nor anyone else in the rural community where she was living would come to her aid, since having a sexual relationship with her husband was her responsibility as a wife, even though she was just a child. N says that since her father had given her to this man she felt that having sex with him was her burden to endure and that he had a right to sex because they were married. She never thought about it from the perspective of her being a child and explains that in the rural areas this is the way of life and no one has a choice, you just have to accept it. Now, living in Addis Ababa with what she calls “a city frame of mind” she says she knows she has rights.

The women’s organizations working against intimate partner violence
The three organizations all agreed that sexual violence within marriages and relationships is widespread. They also agreed that the WHO report showing how women think that they don’t have a right to say no to sex within marriage gives an accurate picture of the norms and values regarding sex and gender. None of the organizations thought that women would define sexual relations within a marriage or relationship as rape.

EWLA: I don’t think they believe or feel it as rape because it’s within a marriage and it’s their husband. They think unless they say okay to sex with him he may go to other women. They may have such beliefs, so they don’t consider it as rape.

AWSAD: I don’t think they see it as rape. Maybe they hate it to have sex without giving their consent but I don’t think they see it as rape.

EWLA and AWSAD believe that women will not label sex within a marriage or a relationship as rape regardless if the sex is with or without consent. The organizations state that within the realm of a marriage or a relationship, women have no possibility of rejecting sex and there is no concept of women’s own right to say no (or yes) to sex. NEWA believes saying no to sex is not an option for women:

Women just don’t say no, it’s the husband deciding when to have sex. So for many women, this is not even a question. They just don’t say no. They don’t. It’s just not in the system. It’s deep in the culture.

Both EWLA and AWSAD underline the fact that there is no law against marital rape. If a woman is forced to have sex with her husband, that is not considered a crime. Rape within marriage not being recognized as a crime makes it difficult for women to define their experiences of nonconsensual sex as rape, or as something they have a right to say no to. AWSAD thinks that because there is no law against marital rape, the law instead makes sex in marriage an obligation, leaving little or no room for women to make decisions concerning sex. EWLA says that when women don’t think they have a right
to say no to sex, that is related to the general societal attitude that women are obliged to serve men. Within a marriage, it’s a woman’s duty to do what her husband wants.

**Analysis**

The previous research showed that people hesitate to label sex within marriage as rape and that there is little understanding of the concept of involuntary sex within marriage. The research also states that women do not think they have the right to say no to sex within marriage. The organizations interviewed didn’t think women label sex within marriage as rape or that they think they can say no to sex with their partners. The women interviewed thought they were being forced to have sex and that this was wrong, but not all of them would label it as rape. The women did however express that they have a right to say no, but that there was no use to say no and no room to negotiate about sex. The women described a situation where even if they know their rights, they can’t enforce them and they are often time left with no choice but to stay in relationships where they are forced to have sex against their will.

**Part Three: Forms of resistance to violence**

Under this heading I explore how the respondents with personal experiences of intimate partner violence describe their responses to the violence and how these responses constitute various “forms of resistance” to violence. All the women I interviewed regarding their experiences of violence described various forms of resistance to the violence inflicted upon them. Following Wade, I employ a broad definition of resistance to violence. As Wade argues:

> any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. (Wade, 1997, p. 25)

To employ such a broad definition of resistance is crucial in order to do justice to the responses to violence that the women describe in the interviews. As Wade emphasizes, many forms of resistance to violence are overlooked “because they don’t fit our assumptions about the nature of resistance, or treated as insignificant because they don’t stop the abuse or present an obvious challenge to the status quo” (Wade, 2002, p. 15). Thus, in many cases, the forms of resistance I identify in the women’s responses did not lead to direct results, namely, it did not prevent the men from continuing to exercise violence and it did not lead the women to escape further violence. Nevertheless, these forms of resistance are important because they highlight the actual or potential agency of the victims and thereby reminds us of their will and capacity to escape or change their situations, if only the relevant means and forms of support are offered to them.

The resistance can be seemingly minimal, as in the case of B, who tried to protect herself with her hands when she was beaten, and who tried to preempt further violence by keeping the house clean,
preparing nice food, and so on. A clean house and food on the table could at times prevent her husband from beating her, why the upkeep of these household chores also came to be strategies of resistance. These acts are examples of what Wade calls “small acts of living,” namely, the myriad ways in which individuals try to protect themselves and strive against violence, even in situations with very restricted possibilities (Wade, 1997). Indeed, as Wade points out, “in extremely threatening circumstances, resistance is typically disguised and indirect” (Wade, 2002 p. 15). Accordingly, one has to understand the “situational logic” in which the victim’s response is inscribed. If B’s actions seem limited, it is because she had almost no alternatives and nowhere else to go. As she explains, “I never said anything when he beat me, I kept quiet, I didn’t have anything”.

B’s actions were the most minimal example of resistance among the women I interviewed. In the case of H, resistance was more overt, even though it continually ran into the problem of a lack of alternatives and support. Thus, H gives the following account of her responses to being assaulted:

**Did you ever talk back to him, or try to tell him that he did something wrong?**

Yeah, I told him most of the time, but he didn’t recognize it. After he beat or after he assault me, he didn’t do it in his right mind, after one day he said oh, sorry, I didn’t know this thing or something like that, and so he starts to beg me, but he always did these things.

**Did you believe him when he said he was sorry?**

I didn’t believe in my heart, but I didn’t have anywhere to go, that’s why I forgave him. But inside me, something bad, I had bad feeling, but I didn’t have anywhere to go, so I decided to stay and forgive him.

**Did you ever try to defend yourself with physical force?**

I don’t have any experience with defense, but I did shout and I did call people and they would come to intermediate.

H here testifies to her resistance: she talks back, telling him that what he is doing is wrong, and she screams, calling out for help from other people. Furthermore, she feels that what he is doing to her is wrong, that she does not deserve it (“I have bad feeling”), which itself is a form of resistance. If she nevertheless forgives him, it is not because she accepts the violence but because she has nowhere else to go. “I don’t have anywhere to go, that’s why I forgive him.”

In several of the other cases (T, E, and N), the women offer direct resistance to the violence by fighting back and returning the insults. T says that a lot of the time she fights back, and is able to fight him off when he is drunk, whereas E maintains that “I always clawed him, like I fought him,” even though in the end “I couldn’t do anything” to prevent the violence. Nevertheless, this resistance was an important step forward for E. As she emphasizes, she wants “to teach the world that a woman can think for herself. She can make decisions for herself… That a woman is capable.” Yet this self-affirmation is continually imperiled because of a lack of social recognition and support. Several of the women (B, H, N, and T) recount how they have tried to commit suicide, in despair at their circumstance and with the sense that there is no other way out. It is important to recognize that suicide, too, is a form of resistance, an expression of the agency of the victim - an agency that can be turned
toward more productive ends if given adequate support. The most striking example is perhaps T, who has tried to commit suicide but at the same time describes a precarious but possible path toward self-affirmation and emancipation. Indeed, T describes many degrees of resistance that all contribute to a victim’s chances of helping herself and others, even if the emancipation remains very limited:

You say that sometimes you get angry and you say no, when he treats you badly, do you talk back to him, do you argue with him?

Yeah, most of the time when he insults me, I start to insult him too and we fight.

Okay, so you fight and you insult him back?

Yeah, insult him back and threaten him back also. I argue with him.

Do you feel that it is good for you to do that, does it help you?

Yes, I feel good [her emphasis]. Because I believe in equality. Most of the time when he tell me bad thing, I will also say bad thing. Especially when he talks about that I am inferior to him, I am less than him...or something else bad.

What do you say then to him?

The same thing that he says to me.

Have you ever defended yourself physically?

Sometimes I defend myself, but if it becomes higher than my capacity, I can’t do anything, so he gets me, he beats me. But I try my best to defend myself.

How would you say that you are handling this?

Just I get patience, sometimes I keep quiet, I don’t want to argue with him, so I can handle it by staying quiet.

Do you feel that there is anything more that you can do to stop this, or to make him not do this?

Most of the time, I go to the elders and ask them to talk to him, and also I counsel him, but he doesn’t listen to me. Most of the time, I ask the elders to talk to him.

And what do they say?

They talk to him and say it’s not good, why do you treat her like this? She got married with you unwillingly, just you should try to catch her nicely, you should treat her nicely. She came with you for you, you brought her here, for your sake she came to this place, so you should treat her nicely, like husband and wife. So don’t do these things, most of the time, they say like this.

Does he listen to them?

For a little bit, for a day or for a month he listens, but after some time he forgets what they say, and he starts again.

Most of the time, because of my life, I pass through this bad experience, so now I have become a brave woman so I counsel women who aren’t married and I tell them that you should find the right person, you should love before you marry someone. If you don’t have any love for him, you shouldn’t get engaged, or don’t go into a marriage without love. If I met a woman with experiences like mine, I counsel them and I encourage them. Sometimes if I am better, I will tell my experience; when he beat me, I did this thing and he became nice or something like that. So counsel, I became like that nowadays.
In T’s responses we can discern at least four forms of resistance to violence, which recur in different versions in the testimonies of the women: 1) Small-scale strategies (keeping quiet to prevent further violence). 2) Direct retaliation in violent situations (fighting back, returning insults and threats). 3) Reaching out to the community (asking the elders for help). 4) Identifying as a woman who stands up for herself and is capable of helping others in similar situations:

Now I have become a brave woman so I counsel women who aren’t married and I tell them that you should find the right person, you should love before you marry someone. If you don’t have any love for him, you shouldn’t get engaged, or don’t go into a marriage without love. If I meet a woman with experiences like mine, I counsel them and I encourage them.

If T has managed to attain the fourth form of resistance (self-identifying as a woman who stands up for herself and can help others), it is important to see how this form of resistance is prepared and enabled by more elementary forms of resistance. Thus, she emphasizes not only that she retaliates in violent situations, but also that this makes her “feel good [her emphasis]. Because I believe in equality.” We can thereby see how the recognition of her active resistance helps T to self-identify as a woman with her own agency and find constructive ways of engaging with other women in the same situation, even when her agency remains very circumscribed by social and economic circumstances. This makes it all the more significant for social workers and women’s organizations to recognize the various forms of resistance that the women engage in. Even when there seems to be no resistance, one often only needs to listen more carefully or for a longer time. Thus, in my interview with N, she first maintained that she never, in a situation of intimate partner violence, talked back or argued or defended herself in any way (“I just cried and kept quiet”). Yet, it emerged later in the conversation that she had engaged in an emphatic form of self-defense and resistance: she “burned the house down and fled to her parents’ home.”
Conclusion
I travelled to Ethiopia with a certain conception of how women in the country respond to and evaluate the violence to which they are subjected. Of all the countries studied in the large-scale *WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005), Ethiopian women had the highest numbers of acceptance of intimate partner violence. And according to the previous research on the subject, Ethiopian women have a high tolerance for, and acceptance of, the violence they endure. Yet when I interviewed women in Ethiopia, I was struck by the courage, sense of their own dignity, and resistance to violence they expressed. This is not because the women I interviewed come from a privileged background, have had access to advanced education, or been fortunate to escape the brutal violence to which so many women are subjected in Ethiopia. On the contrary, these women have all lived through very abusive and violent relationships. Their life stories include being kidnapped and abducted, involuntary marriage as early as the age of seven, and prostitution due to poverty. Several of them have attempted suicide and all of them have been denied the social recognition and support they need and deserve. Nevertheless, their stories are ones of continual resistance and repeated attempts at finding solutions or survival strategies even in the most hopeless circumstances. In my study, I have sought to do justice to this courageous resistance, specifically by providing a framework within which it can become intelligible as resistance and thereby call forth new forms of recognition.

In order to accomplish the aim of providing such a framework, the theories of personalized violence proposed by Allan Wade have been of particular importance. Wade argues that the “discursive operations” through which we thematize and analyze personalized violence tend to distort the nature of the violence. Specifically, Wade identifies discursive operations through which the responsibility of the perpetrator is diminished and the resistance of the victim is disregarded. To counteract these discursive operations, Wade recommends that we should move from a “language of effects” to a “language of responses” (Wade, 2002; Todd & Wade, 2003). Concretely, this means that we should not ask victims of intimate partner violence about the effects of what was done to them (as though they were passive objects merely registering what happened to them). Rather, we should ask them how they responded to the violence, while being aware that responses take many different forms and do not necessarily confirm our common assumptions about the nature of resistance. The latter perspective invites the victims to recognize themselves as active agents (rather than as passive objects) and to identify the resistance they are already expressing, along with the sense of their own dignity and worth that the resistance implies.

Thus, as I have tried to show in my analyses of the interview material, Wade’s capacious notion of resistance allows us to identify forms of resistance that are often overlooked but which are crucial for understanding the actual values and views that the women hold with regard to the violence to which they are subjected. As I have argued, neither the previous research nor the women’s organizations...
working in Ethiopia do justice to these views and values. Rather, they overestimate the women’s degree of acceptance of violence and underestimate the degree of their active resistance.

While one needs to be careful not to offer broad generalizations on the basis of a limited study, I want to conclude by suggesting that my findings have two important implications for social work, one theoretical and one practical. First, I want to suggest that adopting a language of responses (rather than a language of effects) when inquiring about intimate partner violence would yield better and more nuanced results when surveying attitudes toward violence, whether on a national or international scale. If the WHO study, the previous research, and the women’s organizations, all underestimate the ways in which women in Ethiopia resist and seek to counteract violence, it is at least partly because they do not employ a theoretical framework (like the one provided by Wade) that can identify forms of resistance with greater precision and depth. Second, adopting a response-based approach could also have important practical consequences for social work. In therapeutic treatment of women who have been subjected to violence, a response-based approach would prevent one from assuming an exaggerated degree of acceptance of violence. Instead, the response-based approach could enable the women to become more aware of their own resistance to violence and thereby help them recognize their own capacity for agency. However limited the resistance and agency may be, it provides an affirmative starting point for therapeutic conversations and concrete recovery work.

Finally, a better recognition of the women’s resistance to violence (rather than an exaggerated assumption about their acceptance of violence) provides greater incentive to provide adequate institutional and social support for them. Through my interviews, it became clear that the women who were subjected to violence reached out for support to a much greater degree than indicated by the previous research and the women’s organizations. They asked for help or advice from family members, the police, and “the elders,” as well as from others who were within reach. Moreover, they persisted in seeking solutions even when the help was not forthcoming or deeply inadequate. The problem was less that they accepted the violence, or assumed they had no right to reject it, than that the social institutions in which they found themselves did not have the requisite understanding of their plight or the adequate resources to help them. To change this situation requires sustained efforts on many different fronts. But one step on the way is to improve our ability to recognize how victims of violence engage in forms of resistance, and thereby also improve our ability to understand how receptive they can be to help and support if it is offered in the right way.
References
Appendix 1: Letter of consent

Dear participant,

My name is Maria Hägglund and I am conducting a study about perceptions on intimate partner violence for my bachelor essay in Social work. I am a student at Ersta Sköndal University College in Stockholm, Sweden.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time. Your name will not be published.

Your interview will be recorded and transcribed. Neither the recorded interview nor the transcripts will be kept after the bachelor essay is finished.

Thank you for your time and participation!

Date___________ Signature____________________________________________
Appendix 2:

Interview guide 1: The women with personal experiences of intimate partner violence

Background

- Where are you from? Where did you grow up? Town, region of the country etcetera.
- What religion are you?
- How did you grow up? Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? How did you/your family support yourself growing up?
- Where and how do you live now? How did you come to Addis Ababa/Awassa? How did you come in contact with the women´s center?

Relationship: psychological and physical violence

- Can you tell me about the relationship with your husband/partner? How you met and how come you get married/got together. How old were you (and he)?
- How did he treat you?
- Would he scare you and make threats? Would he talk down to you and call you names? Could you contact anyone, meet people, did he isolate you?
- Did he use violence against you? How? When? For what reasons? How did it make you feel, what were your thoughts about it?

Relationship: Sexual violence

- How did you feel about having sex with your husband/partner?
- Could you say no to sex? When? How? Did you think you had the right to say no?
- Did you think he forced you? Did you think of it as rape?
- Do you think rape occurs in marriages?
- Where is the line between sex that is voluntary and sex that is forced? /What do you think is rape?

Perceptions on own experiences

- Do you think he had the right to use violence against you? Why? Why not?
- Do you think that what he did to you was a crime? Did you know it is a crime?
Responses to own experiences

- How did you deal with these things that happened? Did you feel there was anything you could do to stop it or to protect yourself?
- Did you talk back to him, did you argue with him, did you defend yourself?
- Did you want to leave him? Did you try to leave?

Support

- When you were in this relationship, did you confide in anyone about what happened? If so, what was the response?
- Did you have anywhere to turn to? Could you get help? Where, how?

Perceptions on violence

- Do you think this happens to other women?
- Do you think violence against women is common? Why, why not?
- Do women accept violence? Why? Why not? How do women think about violence against women?
- Why do men use violence against women?
- Are these issues discussed within families and within communities? Can women talk about their experiences with each other? Do women get blamed for what happens? Do men and women see it the same way? Is it seen as a man’s right?
- Growing up, did you see violence? Did you experience violence? Was it accepted? Was it seen as normal?

Perceptions on gender

- Do men have the right to decide and make the decisions in the family? Why, why not? Should the man be the head of the household you think?
- How are women seen and valued?

Why?

- Why do you think this has happened in your life? Is there a reason for what happens, does it have a meaning?

Culture and religion

- Are women treated differently, is violence against women seen differently in urban/rural areas, within different regions, different religions?
Change

- How did you feel about the divorce or your husband’s death?
- Do you see your experiences differently now than before?
- Do you have support now? Do you have support here at the women’s center?
- What do you think women with your experiences need in term of support?
- Is there anything you think I missed, anything you want to add?
Appendix 3:

Interview guide 2: The women´s organizations working against intimate partner violence

Introduction

Can you tell me a little about yourself and your background and about your job here at NEWA/AWSAD/EWLA?

Working with the issue of violence against women in the Ethiopian society, what would you include in the term gender based violence?

How do NEWA/AWSAD/EWLA work with the issue of gender based violence?

Harmful Traditional Practices

Do you use the term Harmful Traditional Practices, and if so, what does that term include? What does it mean to say that these practices are traditional?

How are these practices viewed by people you think? How are they justified?

There are no laws against most of these practices; do you think that has made a difference? If so, in what way?

Intimate partner violence

The WHO multi-country study on women´s health and domestic violence against women (2005) show that almost 70% of women agreed that there are justified reasons for husbands to use violence against their wives (for example if they don´t complete housework, or if they disobeys their husbands). What do you think of these numbers? Do they show an accurate picture of women´s attitudes towards intimate partner violence? How would you explain these numbers?

In the same study, only about 35% of women thought that women had the right to say no to sex for any reason (within marriages). How do you think men´s right to sex is seen within marriages, and how is marital rape seen?

Is violence against women accepted? How so? Why? What are the norms behind it?

What are the differences between rural areas and cities like Addis Ababa?

Is there a difference between different regions and different religions?

Is there a difference between different socio economic groups in society? How so?

Is there a generation difference?

What are men´s attitudes towards gender based violence and what is needed to change that?
How do you go about changing people’s attitudes and perceptions concerning intimate partner violence?

What are the view of men and women and their roles?

The law against intimate partner violence, has it made a difference?

Do women have anywhere to turn? What help is there? Do women know their rights, and do they seek help?

Many of the women that I have interviewed say that they had no one to talk to about the intimate partner violence. How do you think that these things are discussed? Is there ways of talking about this?