

Handout II.1: Challenging Guiding Fictions That Lead Many Women to Stay in or Return to an Abusive Relationship

GF = guiding fiction; C = challenge

- GF 1: You made your bed and now you *have to* lie in it.
- C: Just exactly what does this mean? You mean if I decide to do something, I can't change my mind?
- GF 2: You *should* be resigned to live out your sentence.
- C: You mean I don't deserve to be happy? How silly is that?
- GF 3: Marriage is *supposed to* be forever.
- C: Even though my husband broke his part of the marital contract over and over again?
- GF 4: You feel sorry for him, don't you? Therefore, you *should* stay in the relationship or go back to your partner.
- C: Even though staying or going back isn't in my best interest? Even though it won't make me happy in the long run?
- GF 5: He apologized. Therefore, you *should* accept his apology and go back to the way things were.
- C: You mean I can't accept someone's apology and still choose to have nothing to do with him if it's not in my best interest to do so?
- GF 6: If you just try hard enough or get it right, he'll change and you'll be happy. If the relationship doesn't work, *you* failed.
- C: No woman will ever be able to “get it right” with a man who is incapable of having a healthy intimate relationship with anyone.
- GF 7: It's your *responsibility* to make the relationship work.
- C: If two people are in a rowboat and each one has an oar, they both have to row to make the boat move forward. If only one person rows, the boat will go around in circles and won't get anywhere.

The last guiding fiction and challenge is for women with children or who are planning to have children.

GF 8: The children need their father. Therefore, you *should* keep the family together.

C: Do they need a biological father who mistreats me and them? Wouldn't it be better to live in a single-parent home with a mother who's loving and consistent than to live in a two-parent home with a father who's abusive?