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# Incarcerated Men and the Etiology of Intimate Partner Violence

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INCARCERATED MEN AND THE ETIOLOGY OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

ROXANNE SWOGGER

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program  
Of Antioch University  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

INCARCERATED MEN AND THE ETIOLOGY OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

prepared by

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is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Change.

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## Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of 15 incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence. This qualitative grounded theory study revealed the impact significant loss in childhood, the most critical being the loss of a parent, had on these men. The results showed a significant loss set in motion a series of adaptive and maladaptive interpersonal behaviors with significant others, primarily parents and intimate partners that continued through adulthood and incarceration. The grounded theory dimensional analysis revealed five primary dimensions that described the dominant social processes described by the participants. These processes were: seeking, overcoming, blaming, controlling, and disengaging behaviors. The consequences of these interpersonal behaviors led only to disappointment, disillusionment, addiction, promiscuity, rage, violence and ultimately serving a sentence in a correctional institution. The current study broadens the scope for exploring intimate partner violence in illuminating that intimate partner violence is perpetrated through a variety of crimes. Having an understanding of how incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence exhibit cyclical behaviors that escalate in violence has implications for departments of correction in their efforts to break a pattern of recidivism and address successful reentry of male intimate partner offenders into society. The electronic version of this dissertation is at AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive, <http://aura.antioch.edu/> and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

*Keywords:* Intimate partner violence, incarcerated men, grounded theory, dimensional analysis, batterer intervention, offender reentry, leadership

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## Introduction

Intimate partner violence has personal, financial, and societal impacts on the lives of many people. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) has noted that intimate partner violence (IPV) is the one of the most pervasive human rights violations, with 24% of adult women and 14% of adult men experiencing physical abuse by an intimate partner. As a human rights violation, IPV crosses all cultural, ethnic, financial, and religious boundaries. The intersectionality of domestic violence has contributed to the multiple definitions and explanations for the causes of intimate partner violence (Sokoloff, 2008); therefore making it difficult to narrow the focus to one single cause of the phenomenon.

While IPV is described as a societal problem, IPV occurs within the lives of individuals and is experienced “as a personal event” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 1). Such events are often measured, primarily by law enforcement, by the frequency and severity of violence (Stark, 2007). What we have learned from victims and survivors of intimate partner violence is that focusing on the severity of abusive event does not consider the totality of a life of oppression and the denial of personal liberties for victims of domestic violence. This narrow focus results in concealment of emotional and psychological harms of domestic violence.

The financial impact of IPV extends beyond the abusive relationship. It is estimated that 8.3 million days of paid work are lost in the United States due to the impact of intimate partner violence (Peal, 2013). IPV also reduces productivity in the workplace, increases incidents of absenteeism, and drives up the costs of health care, totaling an estimated \$8.3 billion annually in the United States (Peal, 2013).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how partner violent men describe the etiological understanding of their abuses against an intimate partner. Specifically, I aimed to explore how experiences in the family of origin may have related to their adult romantic relationships. This study included incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence and consisted of unstructured interviewing conducted within the grounded theory methodology that included: open coding, purposeful sampling, data analysis, and theoretical saturation.

The broadly defined questions that guided this study are as follows:

Q1: How do partner violent men describe the etiological understanding of their abuses against an intimate partner?

Q2: How do experiences in the family of origin relate to the abuses perpetrated in adult romantic relationship?

## **Rationale for the Study**

In focusing on a study of partner violent men, it is necessary to review the trajectory of how domestic violence came to the forefront as a criminological topic of study. The societal response to domestic violence in the United States over the last 40 years has resulted in legislation, mandatory arrest practices, increased funding for domestic violence shelters, and consequences for partner violent men (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002). These consequences include the criminalization of domestic violence, mandatory batterer intervention programs (BIP), and incarceration. The majority of responses to domestic violence have occurred as a result of the women's movement standing on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (Stark, 2007).

Within the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a push for victims' rights and more intensive policing. The crime wave of the 1960s in the United States led to the creation of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1966 (Young & Stein, 2004), that instituted and administered the first crime victimization survey. The results of the first crime victimization survey in the United States during this time revealed part of what victim's groups were proclaiming: that crime victimization rates were much higher than indicated by law enforcement figures (Young & Stein, 2004). The realization of victimization rates led to 1968 creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) who administered state and local funding to law enforcement agencies, funding for educational program research, and local crime initiatives (Furstenberg, 1971).

The LEAA is significant in that it was a governmental recognition of crime in the United States; however, it did not change the status quo of crime victims in the criminal justice process. A major outrage was how the rights of victims had been subjugated to the state. This is seen in local, state, and federal processes as the prosecutor acts on behalf of the state, thereby allowed to exercise discretion as to what is acceptable in American society and what constitutes mores of our society. The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) followed the implementation of LEAA, and provided greater legislative leverage in dealing with the issue of victimization. VOCA encouraged the enforcement of victim's rights by funding grant programs to implement provisions for victims as individual states had set forth. Much of the state legislation on behalf of crime victims set forth that victims were afforded the right to give voice to decisions made by prosecutors through the establishment of victim-witness representatives, courts, and correctional services. This included the prosecutors lending an ear to the wishes of victims, the right to give

victim impact statements, monetary awards from victim compensation programs, and the right to notifications that include being notified of all hearings, decisions, sentencing and information surrounding release from correctional institutions and community control status.

The rights of victims have thereby been achieved by those who society was not acknowledging, those who emerged “from the foot of the table” (Heifetz, 1994). Heifetz explains that in times of distress, we turn to authority. Crime victims, including domestic violence and sexual assault victims, turned to politicians for protection from social injustices of not only being victimized by crime, but also in being victimized by the criminal justice system that was supposed to support and avenge the wrongs. The crime victims’ movement appealed to legislators and politicians to raise morality and ethics of the criminal justice system. The result has been that the understanding of and responses to IPV has been determined predominantly by victims of domestic violence and government agencies.

While legislative responses to IPV have been realized within the United States and intimate partner homicides have been significantly reduced, the success “has benefited men far more than women. The prevalence of violence against women has not changed significantly in 30 years” (Stark, 2007, p. 7). This, as suggested by the The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2015), can be improved by synthesizing what is known about IPV, supplementing the literature with what is known by field professionals, and identifying promising areas of research.

It has been asserted that abusive men have been eliminated from explicit inquiry in the deconstruction of domestic violence (Hearn, 1998). More recently, the subject of partner violent men has appeared in the critical analysis of domestic violence literature; however, the research has resulted in multiple and disconnected theoretical models that lack coherence in determining



effective causes, deconstruction, and responses to partner violent men (Hearn, 1998). Thus, the current study was designed to explore how partner violent men explain the etiology of their abusive behaviors against an intimate partner and how they make meaning of perpetrating intimate partner violence.

While the efforts of the women's movement and governmental intervention have established the criminalization of IPV and the subsequent consequences for partner violent men, these efforts have not reduced the occurrence of intimate partner violence in our society (Hearn, 1998; Stark, 2007). "The home remains the safest place for men; however by contrast, the home remains the least safe place for women" (Hearn, 1998, p. 4). Studying the violence of men against an intimate partner, and men's understanding of such violence within an ecological systems framework can aid in assimilating multiple, stand-alone theories and further the work of understanding the breadth and depth of partner violence in its totality

### **Methodological Approach**

The essence of grounded theory is to discover relationships and categories in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This statement is supported by Charmaz (2006) with "grounded theory methods foster seeing your data in fresh ways and exploring your ideas about the data through early analytic writing" (p. 2). Grounded theory methodology allows for the responsibility of the researcher in understanding contextual situations of the participants and the data with memo writing being an essential role in the process.

Grounded theory is intended to create a new understanding of a phenomenon that cannot be captured quantitatively. Glaser and Strauss (1967) are very pointed in asserting that qualitative data, specifically the grounded theory method, can systematically and rigorously create theory that extends beyond speculation of ideas. This assertion is followed by the claim

that researchers should use the most appropriate method for the task of inquiry and that qualitative methods are, at times, the only method of obtaining data about a phenomenon. This dissertation provides an alternative to two common practices. The first is to add to the qualitative body of literature in corrections. Representation of qualitative studies in criminal justice publications is disproportionately low with quantitative methods dominating criminological studies (Miller, 2005; Tewksbury, Dabney, & Copes, 2010). A lack of balance between quantitative and qualitative studies has hindered the theoretical advancement within the discipline (Tewksbury et al., 2010). Tewksbury et al. stress the importance of quantitative, along with rigorous qualitative, studies that can serve as a catalyst for continued advancement in the field of criminology.

The second is to approach partner violent men without a preconceived theoretical model. The current practices of batterer interventions predominantly include feminist theory, social learning theory, and less common, family systems theory (Chiffriller, Hennessy, & Zappone, 2006; Lawson, 2013). There has been some marked success with the current predominant philosophy; however, such theoretical assumptions primarily serve as single-theory explanations, which have been criticized for failing to serve the needs of batterer rehabilitation efforts and reduction of recidivism (Houston, 2011). The grounded theory approach to this study may ultimately confirm existing theories of intimate partner violent, as was found in a study of firesetters by Barnoux, Gannon, and O’Ciardha (2014) in which the emergent theory was supported by the literature but expanded the profile of the firesetters in a more comprehensive manner. Equally, the current study may assist in establishing a foundation independent of existing theoretical approaches that expand the development and success of programmatic approaches for partner violent men. The approach taken for the current study will be to distance

pre-conceived theories and causes of intimate partner violence to discover potential theories and/or models of the etiology of intimate partner abuse from the perspective of incarcerated individuals with a history of committing IPV.

### **Positionality**

I have worked for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) for 17 years in various capacities. Beginning my career as a correctional officer in a male correctional institution, I was not aware of the offenses committed by the offenders I supervised. Upon transitioning to the position of Correctional Case Manager, it was my responsibility to gain knowledge of the crimes committed by offenders in order to recommend offense-specific programming in an attempt to guide the offenders to programmatic solutions that could reduce their risk for recidivism. It was in this position that I learned of the minimizations and denials offered by not all, but many, offenders regarding their offenses of conviction. Having access to pre-sentence investigations that provided details of the offenses committed, it was at this point I recognized that the offender's explanations of criminal behavior were often markedly different than police reports and victim statements. Most of the minimizations and outright denials of crimes committed were most often offered by those men convicted of crimes of a sexual nature or intimate partner violence.

During my service with ODRC as a case manager, I was aware that a sex-offender treatment program had been implemented and was well established. When the department introduced a batterer intervention program, I applied for and was accepted to attend the training to become a batterer intervention facilitator at the male correctional institution in which I was employed. In learning the dynamics of domestic violence, it soon became clear that domestic

violence is oftentimes veiled in convictions that are not obvious; however the intent of the crime was often to inflict harm or revenge on a current or former intimate partner.

I facilitated the ODRC batterer intervention program for three years at the same correctional institution. I then transitioned to a position in which I was the administrator of the batterer intervention program in the nine correctional institutions in which it was provided. Delving further into the understanding of IPV and batterer intervention, I learned of the many conflicting theories of domestic violence and the standardization of batterer intervention programs set forth by agencies that provided oversight to such programs. The standards were established by local courts, state legislation, or domestic violence agencies. Upon reviewing the standards in comparison to batterer intervention inquiry, much of the standardization is based upon earlier goals of the women's movement and earlier research that examined the experiences of battered women.

Two predominant tools from earlier qualitative studies have been instrumental in understanding the experiences of abused women. The cycle of violence is illustrative of the abusive patterns often experienced by many abused women (Walker, 1979) and more recently, the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1984) that offers an illustrative view of how abusive behaviors manifest. Such research has also been invaluable in bringing forth the issue of domestic violence as a social and human rights issue; however, men's explanations of perpetrated violence are markedly different than the experiences offered by female victims of domestic violence. As such, the voices of partner violent men have been omitted from furthering the development of more effective batterer intervention treatment. It is my assertion that men's voices need to be incorporated into further development of batterer intervention. The purpose is not to compare their denial with the experiences of women in search of truth. The purpose is for

research to discover cognitive dissonance and implicit associations as it pertains to perpetrating abuse against an intimate partner.

### **The Dissertation and Implications for the Field of Corrections**

This study has implications for correctional leadership. The “tough on crime” political movement was introduced by Barry Goldwater during his 1964 presidential campaign (Alexander, 2011). Coupling this with the “nothing works” doctrine of the mid 1970s and high crime rates (Lipton, Martinson, & Wilkes, 1975) led to subsequent, and rapid, prison expansion throughout the United States beginning in the mid-1970s (MacKenzie, 2006). Sentencing during this period of rapid prison expansion and mass incarceration was intended to serve as a specific deterrent to those who commit criminal offenses and as a general deterrent, meant to prevent others from committing crimes. For the first time in correctional history, the penitentiary became more focused on incapacitation rather than rehabilitation (MacKenzie, 2006). The justice model, or the “just desserts” (MacKenzie, 2006, p. 10) doctrine was predominant until the 1990s. The field of corrections during the 1990s gained momentum for a returned focus on rehabilitation from the work of criminologists claiming that effective programming to reduce crime during incarceration is possible (MacKenzie, 2006).

With a renewed focus on rehabilitation, the field of corrections has endeavored to reduce crime through effective programmatic interventions. Those interventions include: substance abuse treatment, sex-offender treatment, and desistance of criminal thinking errors. An overlooked phenomenon within correctional systems is implementation of programmatic interventions that address partner violent men (Belknap, 2010; Oliver, 2010). Prisons, as stated by Belknap (2010) “is the ideal place to offer batterer interventions in that they provide, quite literally, a captive audience” (p. 397). The suggestion of reframing IPV as a “men’s problem” as

opposed to a women's problem (Belknap, 2010; Hearn, 2007; Oliver, 2010) focuses the accountability for desistance on partner violent men.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The second chapter provides a review of the literature explaining the guiding philosophy and current practices in which batterer intervention was built upon. The third chapter contains the methodological justification for the selection of conducting grounded theory with incarcerated men to include considerations for conducting interviews with the selected sample. The fourth chapter, Methodology, reveals the steps of the data collection, data analysis, and a detailed exploration of how the findings were obtained. Lastly, the fifth chapter provides an explanation of how the study has relevance to theory and to the practice of batterer intervention programming.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **History of Batterer Intervention Programs**

The goals of batterer intervention programs seek to hold batterers accountable for their abusive behavior and center their work on male re-socialization toward equality for women. Batterer's intervention programs began at the request of battered women advocates as they rejected mental health considerations and anger management as causing male abuse against women in intimate relationships (Alderondo & Mederos, 2002). Prior to the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, IPV was viewed as a private matter not to be intruded upon by police (MacKenzie, 2006). The issue of IPV has become not only a social issue, but also a criminal justice issue. This expansion of becoming an issue within the criminal justice system became solidified with the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Corvo, Dutton, & Chen, 2008; Coulter & VandeWeerd, 2009). Courts became an instrumental piece of a coordinated community response in addressing the issues of IPV as they presented themselves to police, judicial professionals, and probation officers. Courts began intermediate sanctioning of mandated batterer's intervention programs with courts and probation officers monitoring compliance of such sanctions.

### **Current Guiding Theories of Batterer Interventions**

Current practices for the majority of batterer interventions predominantly include feminist theory, social learning theory, and less common, family systems theory. Although batterer intervention programs have been in existence since the 1970s, there are criticisms regarding the theoretical philosophies, evaluation methods, and implementation of such programs. While batterer intervention programs have obtained some marked success within the current programmatic philosophy (Gondolf, 2009), other researchers assert that treatment

approaches have been founded on “premature” (Chiffrieller et al., 2006, p. 81) claims based on theoretical assumptions. Such theoretical assumptions included identifying batterers as a homogeneous group, the enactment of state law or policy for batterer intervention delivery that may not serve the needs of the batterer in need of rehabilitative services (Houston, 2011), or the treatment-cure approach as opposed to treatment-continued support approach (Hamberger, 2008).

### **Feminist Theory**

An essential foundation of Feminist Theory is gender inequality. Feminist theory, as it pertains to domestic violence, maintains focus on the social context in which violence occurs. Del Martin was the first to present a feminist account of IPV and focused heavily on patriarchy and the lack of service response to abused women. Initially, feminist thought focused broadly on the extensiveness of social disparities between men and women and that differences between men and women extend to illustrate the broad cultural and institutional disparities in social, economic, and political opportunities between men and women (Rich, 2001). More specifically, “a feminist perspective takes a more macrosystemic approach to partner violence by examining the context in which violence occurs by addressing culture and institutional inequalities which exist between men and women” (Schubert, Protinsky, & Viers, 2002, p. 4). DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz (2007) bring forth current feminist thought that examines exosystem and microsystem level considerations such as “unemployment, globalization, deindustrialization, life stress events, intimate relationship status, familial and societal patriarchy, substance abuse, male peer support, and other factors” (p. 878).

Batterer intervention programs have been created to address social and cultural institutionalized violence against women. This method of delivery proposes to re-socialize



abusive men to change their attitudes toward women in an effort to increase men's respect for their intimate partner and to hold men accountable to accept responsibility for their own behavior (Coulter & Vand Weerd, 2009). DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz (2007) expound on the role and importance of feminists and feminist theory in batterer intervention programming:

The goal of feminist work in crime and justice is not to push men out so as to pull women in, but rather to gender the study of crime and criminal justice. In other words, feminist approaches to violence and abuse seek to add salient factors into research rather than demanding that consideration of entire socially significant categories be eliminated. (p. 877)

Supporting the influence of feminist thought in batterer intervention are the findings that gender role rigidity has been found to moderately predict partner violent men's abuse against women (Lisak & Beszterczey, 2007) and is significant for inclusion in IPV programming for men.

Cavanaugh and Gelles (2005) assert that profeminist theory, that of men possessing control of women and using their control to gain control of women in intimate relationships, is an untestable theory in that "it is therefore impossible to test a theory whereby the purported cause is also the consequence" (p. 157). Contradictions have been found by Dutton and Sonkin (2003) with prevailing feminist approaches to batterer intervention and state "It assumes that attitudes control abusive behavior when research data suggests that both attitudes and behavior are symptoms of deeper personality factors" (p. 2). These findings infer an historical lack of rigorous study in effectively addressing the discontinuation of intimate partner abuse. This viewpoint is further expounded with the claim that victim advocacy, rather than science, has determined the theoretical foundations of the field of batterer interventions (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005).

## Social Cognitive Theory

Another significant theory that has influenced batterer intervention systems is Social Cognitive Theory. Previously referred to as Social Learning Theory, social cognitive theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1971) and examines how routine actions are learned through observation. Bandura found that “high-status adults (such as the parents) are the most effective models for aggression, and dependent children are the most compliant learners” (Dutton, 1995, p.72). Berry (2000) also finds “the most powerful teaching tool for children is their parent’s example (p. 133). Lisak and Beszterczey (2007) have found “Childhood abuse is a crucial risk factor for later violence, arguably the most crucial single factor that can be identified” (p. 118). A predominant theory of how men become abusive in intimate relationships is through classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning (Lawson, 2013).

Men’s behavior, attitudes, and expectations concerning women are most often originally influenced by how their fathers (or other male caretakers) treated their mothers. These behaviors and attitudes are additionally shaped by male peer pressure and societal messages concerning gender roles and the legitimacy of violence as a means of resolving differences. Violence can also be “positively reinforced” when it enables a person to establish control and dominance in his intimate relationships. While violence also leads to negative outcomes, such as the loss of closeness, some men come to prioritize control over closeness (Alderondo & Mederos, 2002, p. 4)

From a social learning perspective, men are exposed to violence as boys and thus violence becomes a pattern of learned behavior.

A summary provided by Dutton (1999) outlines the shortcomings of social cognitive theory’s explanation of depression, chronic anger, attribution styles, accumulation of internal tension, attachment styles, and tendencies to ruminate. “I argue that behavioral imitation exists on a psychological substratum created by early trauma” (Dutton, 1999, p. 432). The trauma experiences Dutton is referring to are childhood exposure to physical abuse, shaming by a parent, and insecure attachment. While exposure to violence in the family of origin and being a

recipient of child abuse has empirically shown to contribute to the intergenerational transmission of violence, it does not explain why all children exposed to family violence and abuse do not continue the learned violence in adulthood. Social cognitive theory is based on the stimulus-response paradigm, and as such, Dutton's (1999) critique of social learning theory as an all-encompassing explanation for intimate partner violence is that while cognition and behaviors are the result of external stimuli, abusive behaviors are "predatory and pro-active, and serves intrapsychic functions such as ego/identity cohesion and/or tension reduction" (p. 433). This theory is based on external factors and a concern of social cognitive theory as a cause of intimate partner violence (IPV) is that it does not provide an all-encompassing account for the self-generated tension, aggression, and delusional jealousy of abusive men as reported by victims of IPV (Dutton, 1995).

### **Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory is a more recent explanation of IPV (Lawson, 2013) and attributes family violence to the patterns of interaction between all family members. Family systems theory "holds that individuals within families are intricately connected to one another and that experiences in one part of the system effects all other parts as well" (Murray, 2006, p. 234). The essence of family systems theory is the concept of circular causality and the labeling of behavior in this theory is not considered in terms of good or bad. Behavior is considered in the function it serves within the family system to include intergenerational interactions, processes and functions of families (Murray, 2006). Violence, in accordance with this theory, is interactional with violence serving as a method to restore the family system to a state of equilibrium (Chiffmiller et al., 2006).

Family systems theory is the most controversial in the treatment of family violence (Murray, 2006). A point of disagreement in family systems theory is the reciprocal interaction of family members (Dutton, 2007; Lawson, 2013). This interaction and reciprocal nature of IPV is illustrated in a study conducted by Fournier, Brassard and Shaver (2011) in which the demand/withdraw patterns of the intimate relationship are described as a dyadic process. The Fournier et al. study, in essence, was not a study in alleviating the primary aggressor from responsibility for abuse. In the realm of attachment theory, the authors' highlighted how individual attachment mediated dyadic responses to demand/withdraw interaction patterns. One of the unanswered questions concerning IPV in family systems theory is whether violence is considered functional in the family system and whether victims and abusers are equal contributors to such violence. Feminists staunchly oppose the premise of victims contributing to the dyadic process of IPV based on the power imbalance between the abused and the abuser (Murray, 2006).

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is a recent consideration to addressing intimate partner violence and has not been embraced entirely into treatments for batterers. Attachment theory, as developed by Bowlby (1973), provides an understanding of development and how individuals relate to others and to the world around them. Attachment theory posited that the early experiences are formative for personality development and thus allows to trace similar attachment characteristics in the developed personality. More specifically, Bowlby's perspective "starts with a class of event—loss of mother-figure in infancy or early childhood—and attempts thence to trace the psychological and psychopathological processes that commonly result" (Bowlby, 1973). Attachment theory describes the mental representations individuals hold of self, others, and the

world and engages the developed patterns of relating to others and the maintenance of relationships that include those with parents, peers, and in romantic relationships. The maintenance of these relationships involves “different strategies of affect regulation and interpersonal behaviors in response to actual or potential attachment threats” (Metzger, Erdman, & Ng, 2010, p. 19).

The affect regulation is largely determined by developed working models of self and other. The developed working model as influenced by the first attachment relationship with the primary caregiver remains stable over time and becomes a patterned way of relating to others (Valdez, Lilly, & Sandberg, 2012) or it can be described as “the mechanism by which early attachment experiences affect a person throughout life” (Feeney & Noller, 1996, p. 91).

Bowlby’s (1973) explanation of a person’s attachment experience is described

One tends to assimilate any new person with whom he may form a bond, such as a spouse, or child, or employee, or therapist, to an existing model (either of one or other parent of self), and often to continue to do so despite repeated evidence that the model is inappropriate. Similarly he expects to be perceived and treated by them in ways that would be appropriate to his self-model, and to continue with such expectations despite contrary evidence. (as cited in Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007, p. 446)

Bowlby posits that attachment behavior characterizes human beings “from the cradle to the grave” (as cited in Marvin & Brittner, 2008, p. 269), thus, the established neural pathways contribute to the attachment process as continuous throughout the life span and are resistant to change.

The search for power and control that results in intimate partner violence can be the result of activation of attachment processes that seek proximity to or distance from the intimate partner in response to a real or perceived threat. Attachment theory considers the internal processes that result in the search for power and control and may assist in the explanation of male perpetrated domestic violence within heterosexual intimate relationships and may have implications as well

for same-sex relationships and female-initiated partner violence in heterosexual romantic relationships. As attachment is viewed as a critical component in intimate partner violence (Dutton, 2007; Pistole & Arrocale, 2003), the concept can greatly inform the administration of batterer intervention programs in addressing IPV beyond the male abuser-female victim dyad.

Critics of attachment theory state attachment theories are primarily based on the characteristics of batterers as opposed to the outcomes of attachment-based interventions (Goldolf, 2009). Such empirical evidence has been primarily gained by comparing partner-violent to non-partner violent men in community or probation status samples.

Another critique of attachment theory considerations pertaining to domestic violence is the claim that attachment is based upon the primary caregiver-child relationship in which the mother is typically the primary caregiver. This, according to Buchanan (2013), is a gendered analysis and does not consider social factors in the development of attachment dimension. This view is also criticized for the assumption that infants and children only attach to one figure when others claim attachment can occur with multiple individuals, typically family members.

Such single theories have been incorporated or are beginning to be incorporated into batterer intervention programs. In addition to disagreements within the field of batterer intervention programming (BIP), there are also criticisms in the implementation and methodological approaches in determining how to measure and what to measure for such programs.

### **Critiques of Batterer Intervention Program Evaluations**

The field of batterer's intervention has been in existence for approximately 40 years and is regarded as a relatively new field of study (Houston, 2011). Five experimental program evaluations and the meta-analyses based on the findings have shown little program effect of

batterer interventions (Gondolf, 2009). Corvo et al. (2008) assert “numerous empirical studies, literature reviews, and meta-analyses of standard model interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence have found little or no positive effect on violent behavior” (p. 112). Concerns of program effectiveness include the definition of what domestic violence is in an intimate relationship, how to determine success rates in considering domestic violence as underreported to law enforcement, and elements of standardization that concern curriculum and program delivery. Heterogeneity of male batterers has also been studied with mixed results, adding to the dilemma of standardized programming for all male perpetrators of domestic violence.

### **What Constitutes Domestic Violence**

While referrals to batterer intervention programs are commonly made by judges and probation officers, there is continued skepticism about the treatment effectiveness of men who batter (Stark, 2007). The necessity of the criminal justice system viewing crime as incident-based creates a dilemma for judges, police, probation, and parole officers in understanding the totality of domestic violence. The denial of liberty and the cumulative nature of oppression that occurs within intimate partner relationships elude the criminal justice system due to the fact that many of the coercive and abusive behaviors occurring in abusive relationships are not determined to be illegal.

Failure to appreciate the multidimensionality of oppression in personal life has been disastrous for abuse victims. Regardless of its chronic nature, courts treat each abuse incident they see as a first offense. Because well over 95% of these incidents are minor, no one goes to jail. (Stark, 2007, p. 10)

While mandatory and preferred arrest doctrines have been adopted in many states and police jurisdictions (Ames & Dunham, 2002), this has created a perfunctory normalization through the court systems, also referred to as the “revolving door.”

### **Success Rates and Measurement of Domestic Violence**

Even with appropriate and timely referrals to batterer intervention, there is disagreement among researchers in determining the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs. Corvo et al. (2008) assert “numerous empirical studies, literature reviews, and meta-analyses of standard model interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence have found little or no positive effect on violent behavior” (p. 112). The lack of empirical evidence for batterer intervention effectiveness is concerning. “Success” in relation to batterer intervention is difficult to define. Re-arrest rates are misleading due to the overwhelming incidents of unreported domestic violence. Re-arrest rates are also limited to those offenders who serve a period of probation or a short period of incarceration. Re-arrest rates for more severe acts in which a long period of incarceration has been served that evidence domestic violence behavior, such as murder, attempted murder, or other violent acts against intimate partner, are not accurately measured as domestic violence re-arrests. Rather, such violations are oftentimes considered parole violations when the offender does not abide by parole stipulations. Another shortcoming in measuring batterer intervention effectiveness is differentiating between domestic violence and abuse. Abusive acts, particularly coercive control tactics, are not illegal and therefore, difficult to capture in measuring the success of programmatic interventions.

### **Standardization of Batterer Intervention Programs**

Standardization in many states has established guidelines for the length and facilitation of what has been determined as legitimate programs. Standardization has been increasing since the 1990s (Coulter & VandeWeerd, 2009) with guidelines asserting group intervention as the format (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005). The standard acceptable duration of a batterer’s intervention program is between 26 and 52 weeks. Many states and agencies have also determined that



batterer's interventions should be co-facilitated by a male and female to model equality and respect between the male and female co-facilitators. Such programs are often cognitive-behavioral program which have shown to be effective in correctional settings (Berry, 2000). Notwithstanding, much of what is known about the domestic violence has been brought forth through accounts of victimization and survival from victims of domestic violence. While such accounts from victims of domestic violence are imperative, such inquiry from the victim's perspective has largely shaped governmental responses to domestic violence with rigid standardization of batterer intervention programs. Noting the standardization of many states and agencies, Corvo et al. (2008) report that standardization of domestic violence interventions have largely been determined by governmental or quasi-governmental agencies and have essentially been immune to the same standards of empirical rigor as other cognitive programs set forth to achieve behavioral change (p. 112). This point is illustrated in state-mandated batterer intervention standards in North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Michigan that specifically exclude intervention based on family systems theory or forms of couple's counseling (Murray, 2006). Campbell, Neil, Jaffe, and Kelly (2010) cite "research and public efforts" that have been dedicated to responding to domestic violence victims while "some effort has gone into understanding how to appropriately address and help perpetrators" (p. 413).

**Batterer typologies.** The evaluation of batterer intervention programs, unreported domestic violence, and the difficulty in defining the definition of success creates challenges for criminal justice professionals in determining the worthiness and appropriateness of referring partner violent men to IPV treatment. Adding to the difficulty of evaluating batterer intervention programs is the proposition of batterer typologies. It is well documented that batterers are a heterogeneous group (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005; Chiffrieller et al., 2006, Lawson, 2013). A

question posed by some batterer intervention researchers is “what kind of program works for what types of men under what circumstances?” (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005), indicating that one-size-fits-all programming is not sufficient for partner violent men. In determining typologies of batterers, research has sought to understand such differences by studying types of partner violence committed and motives of such violence.

Batterer typologies have been determined largely by descriptive dimensions (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005) that have included studies of partner violent men and descriptive data gathered from women who have been victims of IPV (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005; Gondolf, 1988; Mauricio & Lopez, 2009). From the literature, it appears that the search for batterer typologies has been existent since 1977. Findings for batterer typologies span from two to five typologies, each based on different constructs in the determination of typologies (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005; Chiffrieller et al., 2006). Such constructs used to determine batterer typologies have been: sociological data and onset of violence (Brisson, 1981), frequency of violence, substance abuse (Gondolf, 1988), need for control, characteristics of batterers (Allen, Calsyn, Fehrenbach, & Benton, 1989), personality characteristics (Hamberger & Hastings, 1986), personality development (Holtzworth-Munroe, Stewart, & Hutchinson, 1997), and comparisons of violent to non-violent men (Chiffrieller et al., 2006). With empirical results indicating a lower than desirable success rate with male batterers, researchers have recently sought to expand the purview of the causes and treatment of partner violent men. The examination of single theories or typologies has resulted in the division of research endeavors. It is at this point in the study of batterer intervention that it may be beneficial to expand the purview of batterer intervention inquiry to that of an all-encompassing approach and explore the Ecological Systems Theory.

## **Ecological Systems Theory**

Stand-alone theories have contributed to explaining intimate partner violence and each theory serves as complementary and interactive as opposed to competitive when viewed as part of the ecological system (Dutton, 2006). The ecological understanding of IPV posits that behavior is shaped by individual relationships and the social surroundings (Ali & Naylor, 2013). Ecological Systems Theory was preceded by Nested Ecological Theory. The definition of nested ecological theory provides a multifaceted framework for the understanding of intimate partner violence that incorporates the multiple theories encapsulating the different domains of our existence.

Nested Ecological Theory is the theoretical structure into which social and psychological characteristics are fitted. Such theories are developed primarily by developmental psychologists and ethologists and are so-called because more precise variables (e.g., individual development) are viewed as ‘nested in’ (operating within) broader variables (e.g., cultural norms, subcultures). (Dutton, 2006, p. 19)

Bronfenbrenner is noted as introducing ecological systems theory (Dutton, 2006; Neal & Neal, 2013) and the multiple levels that are ‘nested’ within the other. The conceptual nature of ecological systems theory is that of the individual’s interaction with the environment is seen as a system. Neal and Neal have proposed an updated concept to Bronfenbrenner’s theory, known as Ecological Systems Theory, as networked as opposed to nested, or operating within one another. It is proposed that each level of development interacts with one another, with mutual influence occurring among the multiple levels, thereby creating a system of relational exchange within and among individuals (Neal & Neal, 2013). The levels proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977), Belsky (1980), and Neal and Neal (2013) consists of: macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, microsystem, and ontogenetic.

**Levels of ecological systems theory.** The macrosystem consists of general archetypes that broadly establish sets of cultural beliefs. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), “Most are informal and implicit” (p. 515) and such broad beliefs have been historically embedded in religious and legal thought. The macrosystem has been the focus of most sociological studies.

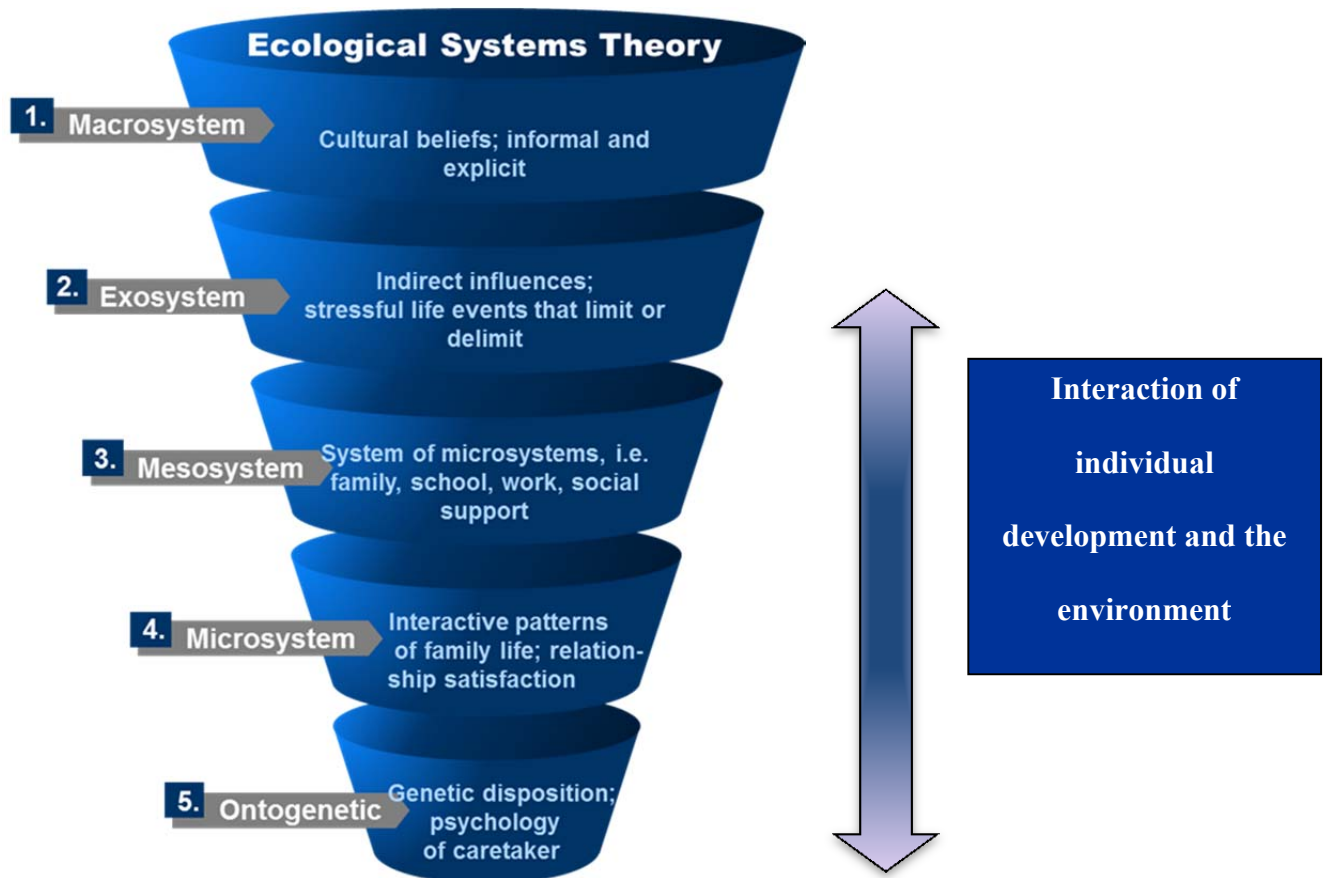
Indirect influences are what constitute the exosystem. Examples of such factors are unemployment, stressful life events, informal social networks, the distribution of goods and services, and job stress (Belsky, 1980). The exosystem represents “social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there” (Belsky, 1980, p. 321).

The mesosystem is comprised of “a system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 521). For children, the mesosystem can be the immediate environment of family and school. For adults, the mesosystem can be comprised of microsystems that include, work, family, and church. Trotter and Allen (2009) assess the mass of empirical work that suggests “social support plays a critical role in mitigating the effects of negative life events and numerous studies have provided evidence of a positive correlation between support and well-being” (p. 221). The authors continue to explain how informal relationships and the social environment, or mesosystem, can have a negative impact on well-being (Trotter & Allen, 2009). While Dutton (2006) does not include the mesosystem of ecological systems theory in his system of intimate partner violence, the mesosystem is included for review based upon the work of Trotter and Allen in finding that social support plays a critical role in well-being.

The immediate environment is the description of the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1977) defines the microsystem as one that consists of “relations between the developing person

and the immediate environment” (p. 521). For children, the microsystem is the interaction patterns of family life. Regarding adults, relationship satisfaction has been determined to be a proximal factor in IPV (Smith Slep, Heyman, Foran, & United States Air Force Family Advocacy Research Program, 2014).

The ontogenetic level consists of the forces at work within the individual (Belsky, 1980). Ontogenetic development includes genetic dispositions; however, it is not completely predictable. While there may exist specific tendencies for certain behaviors, the personal and social environment can cause developmental variation. This is described as developmental niches “which include three interrelated subsystems: the social and physical environment in which the individual lives; the shared practices of care, and the psychology of the caretakers” (Seidle-de-Moura & Fernandes Mendes, 2012, p. 4). Experience-dependent maturation exists throughout life; however major socioeffective transformations occur in infancy, typically between 10–12 months and 15–18 months of age (Shore, 1994). A chart of the interconnectedness of Ecological Systems Theory is displayed in Figure 2.1.



*Figure 2.1.* A chart of the interconnectedness of Ecological Systems Theory. Adapted with permission by Presentermedia.com.

Ecological systems theory includes the interactivity of all systems at work and includes the internal process and external influences occurring within and among individuals. In describing the interactions within the self and among the world, Wilbur (2000) explains such in the terms of quadrants and asserts that an integral approach requires attention to the various levels of our existence “without privileging any” (Wilbur, 2000, p. 71). The ecological system relies on the dynamics of each level of the system. “By examining the interaction of ontogenetic characteristics with social context features, we can begin to make predictions about individual behavior patterns” (Dutton, 2007, p. 21). Individually, and at times, one level of influence may

be prominent; however the ecological system of behavior must consider all levels without asserting that one is primarily dominant over the other at all times.

It has been determined that there is no single cause of violence (Bowes & McMurrin, 2013). Application of ecological systems theory in the understanding of IPV allows researchers and practitioners to remain sensitive to individual and social factors, thereby providing a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the phenomenon (Dutton, 2007; Levondosky, Bogat, Huth-Bocks, Rosenblum, & von Eye, 2011). It has been shown that all ecological levels are relevant to IPV either proximally or distally (Smith Slep et al., 2014). Caution is warranted to not reduce the causes of IPV simply to ontogenetic explanations and to focus on the combination, or interaction, of multiple levels as described in ecological systems theory to determine how violent and abusive outcomes are produced in abusive relationships (Dutton, 2007).

### **Incarcerated Partner Violent Men**

Many studies of partner violent men have included only those men who are serving a term of community control such as probation. Such inquiry has included domestic violence occurrences at the misdemeanor level. A review of incarcerated men with a history of perpetrating intimate partner violence will provide a broader spectrum for considering the causes and desistance of intimate partner violence.

**Incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence.** It is known that many incarcerated men have a history of abuse against a current or former intimate partner (Belknap, 2010; Oliver, 2010). Oliver states the rate of incarcerated offenders with a history of abuse against an intimate partner is 1 in 3, with 1 in 10 incarcerated men indicating that the violence against an intimate partner was severe (Day, Richardson, Bowen, & Bernardi, 2014).

“What we do know is that incarcerated populations are disproportionately represented among persons with a history of domestic violence offending and victimization experiences” (Oliver, 2010, p. 389). Results of a 2009 and 2010 intake study conducted within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC Classification Specialists, 2009) found that 1 in 4 incarcerated men have a documented history of abuse against an intimate partner, regardless of offense conviction (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 2010). We see from these figures that a history of intimate partner violence perpetration is disproportionately high among incarcerated men (Belknap, 2010). These figures also emphasize the critical importance of addressing intimate partner violence during incarceration, particularly with the considerations that many of the felony offenses of conviction do not reflect the context of the offending behavior (Day et al., 2014).

The studies that have been conducted on men’s acts of intimate partner violence most often center inquiry on the batterer’s accounts of what happened during the abusive incident(s) (Dempsey & Day, 2011; Hearn, 1998; Mullaney, 2007; Smith, 2007; Wood, 2004). The results of such studies are a culmination of the batterer’s minimizations, denials, justifications, and passivizing structures. Gathering data on the offender’s understanding of how he became abusive would provide a shift in the exploration of abusive behavior and offer the offender opportunity to explore the construction of the self.

### **Exposure to Violence**

The single theories presented as explanations for intimate partner violence all include childhood interactions, development, and experiences. In shifting the language with batterers from “what did you do?” to “how did you arrive at abusive behaviors?,” an exploration of early childhood experiences is a necessary point to begin.



**Exposure to violence in the family of origin.** Child maltreatment has been referenced as the “invisible epidemic” (Bremner, 2003, p. 271) and has been found to have long-term effects on a child’s development into adulthood (Bremner, 2003; Briere & Rickards, 2007; Cicchetti, 1996). While early childhood experiences do not completely control adult behavior, such experiences have been described as resulting in protective factors or risk factors. Factors that are considered predictors of stability in children are the relationships with early caregivers, the mother’s relationship with her intimate partner, and family characteristics (Cicchetti, 1996; Levondosky et al., 2011). Early exposure to violence and experiencing violence has been determined to be one of the most consistent predictors of male perpetration of IPV (Dutton, 1999; Godbout, Dutton, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2009). The activation of the attachment response, in children, occurs when the child’s environment or caregiver is threatened (Dutton, 1999; Levondosky et al., 2011), concluding that exposure to domestic violence is a stressor that can have an impact on the development of attachment and create risk factors relevant in adulthood.

In discussing domestic violence, it is important to provide context of the totality of an abusive home. Exposure to violence is not limited to physical assaults of the primary caregiver from the abusive partner. Included in the definition of domestic violence are the range of behaviors that may include verbal threats and coercive behavior in addition to physical violence (Spilsbury et al., 2007). A dilemma for the abused mother is often a perpetual series of choices to be made in an environment in which she must choose between her own safety and the safety of her children. Such situations may often result in the primary caregiver, the abused mother, choosing the least dangerous option (Stark, 2007). In addition to directly witnessing interparental violence, exposure to violence also includes hearing incidents of IPV and observing the immediate effects after the incident (Anda et al., 2006; Spilsbury et al., 2007). Witnessing

and observing such acts of physical and coercive control by the partner violent abuser add to the stress experienced by children in abusive homes (DeJonghe, von Eye, Bogat, & Levondosky, 2011; Dutton, 1999).

The chronicity of violence witnessed or experienced has an adverse impact on children as well as the developmental stage in which trauma is encountered. Children who were exposed to parental violence during the first year of life were likely to develop more adverse consequences by the age of four (Anda et al., 2006). Inquiry of older children who perceived the violence as a threat to their personal safety has shown a negative impact on behavior (Anda et al., 2006; Dutton, 1999; Spilsbury et al., 2007). The effects on behavior are more pronounced when children who witness violence are also victimized during a domestic violence incident. Partner violent men who witnessed interparental violence have been found to have higher rates of IPV as well as higher rates of insecure attachment (Anda et al., 2006; Dutton, 2000; Godbout et al., 2009;). It has been concluded that care from the primary caregiver has an impact on the development of affect regulation and the ability to self-regulate that can lead to maladaptive attachments in adulthood (Cicchetti, 1996).

All child maltreatment factors can contribute to adverse effects on children to a greater or lesser degree. The impact of witnessing domestic violence and co-occurring victimization of children who witness IPV can be considered a risk factor in addition to other childhood adverse experiences. The chronicity of events within the home have been found by the field of neuroscience to have long-term behavioral and social impacts (Anda et al., 2006; Fraley, Roisman, & Haltigan, 2013), concluding that such early attachment relationships and development are compromised.

The majority of studies involving partner violent men have been conducted on men who have been mandated to community batterer intervention programming (Cambell, Neil, Jaffe, & Kelly, 2010; Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005). Upon failure to successfully complete such programming, often the result is deemed a probation violation which can result in serving a period of incarceration. Largely, it is at this point in which the study of partner violent men becomes scarce. Few studies examined the treatment for partner violent men throughout a period of incarceration (Belknap, 2010). Implicit in this is the assumption that incarceration eliminates the domestic violence behavior. Additionally, the studies conducted on participants who largely are sentenced to a period of arrest and batterer intervention eliminates men who have committed offenses severe enough to warrant an immediate sentence of incarceration.

An examination of incarcerated men can assist in discovering the range of violence in intimate relationships that result in physical harm to death. Furthermore, an analysis of early developmental experiences in the family of origin of incarcerated men with a history of IPV can further illuminate contributing strategies in the continued development of effective batterer intervention programs, particularly in addressing programmatic needs for correctional systems.

### **Summary**

Single theories fail to explain the totality of intimate partner violence when considering the development and desistance of domestic violence perpetration. With consideration of the prevalence of intimate partner violence perpetration among incarcerated men, it is known that interpersonal conflict upon release exacerbates the risk of re-offending (Day et al., 2014; Hairston & Oliver, 2006). Moreover, correctional systems are in need of extending the considerations of re-offending beyond general risk assessments (Day et al., 2014). Consideration of multi-causal models in the analysis of risk factors and precipitating situations

can aid in obtaining a more holistic understanding of partner violent men and in the development of more effective therapeutic interventions, specifically for the sub-population of incarcerated men. Such inquiry can benefit from discovering the breadth and depth of individual complexity that includes: individual development, family systems, and social constructions of self, other, and situations. The foreshadowed questions to the research study are:

Q1: How do incarcerated partner violent men describe the etiological understanding of their abuses against an intimate partner?

Q2: How do experiences in the family of origin relate to the abuses perpetrated in adult romantic relationships?

These questions can set the course for further understanding of intimate partner violence that result in felony-level abuses. Additionally, gaining a deeper understanding of men's violence as described by the men who perpetrate such violence can assist correctional leadership in developing a more comprehensive approach to addressing partner violent men during a period of incarceration.

## **Methodology**

In this chapter, I propose a constructivist methodology, grounded theory, to explore the overarching research question “How do partner violent men describe the etiological understanding of their abuses against an intimate partner in adult romantic relationships?” First, I explore the origins and foundational principles of the grounded theory method and its methodological fit to the purpose of this research topic. A critical step in Grounded Theory is the identification of individuals who have characteristics, background and experience with the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the procedures for implementing this study are proposed including: participant characteristics, interviewing, coding, and ethical considerations. The foreshadowed questions to the research study are:

Q1: How do partner violent men describe the etiological understanding of their abuses against an intimate partner?

Q2: How do experiences in the family of origin relate to the abuses perpetrated in adult romantic relationships?

### **Beginnings of Grounded Theory**

The empirical environment for quantitative and qualitative research methods was challenged by Glaser and Strauss (1967) when they introduced grounded theory as a method of qualitative inquiry. Their acknowledgement of how quantitative methods had made great strides, particularly after World War II, was contrasted against the qualitative methods of inquiry that were unsystematic and failed to produce theory. The description offered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicated that qualitative methods, specifically in the field of sociology, were stagnant, stating “In short, the work based on qualitative data were either not theoretical enough or the theories were too impressionistic” (p. 15). Upon review of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the goals of the authors became evident: to introduce a systematic method for qualitative inquiry and to provide for the discovery of new theories, specifically in the field of sociology. It is important to understand the concepts of symbolic interactionism in understanding and conducting grounded theory. As written by Bowers (1988), grounded theory emerges from the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. The tenets of symbolic interactionism hold that reality is socially constructed and that human behavior is based on constructed meanings (Bowers, 1988). Such meanings are constructed through the process of interpretation and as such, are a formative process (Blumer, 1986). Further, in accordance with symbolic interactionism, realities for individuals are based upon their experience, culture, history and circumstances (Bowers, 1988). The premise for symbolic interactionism is that individual behavior cannot be understood outside of the social context and the attached meanings formed for individuals (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007). With the foundation of grounded theory being built on the premise of symbolic interactionism, the goal was not intended for qualitative inquiry as a replacement for quantitative methods. “Conversely, the goal was for qualitative inquiry to serve as a viable method of research and dependent upon the goals of a study, quantitative or qualitative methods could be engaged to verify or discover theory, respectively” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss laid the foundation for the existence of grounded theory and set to establish clear guidelines for systematic qualitative research. Their goal was to illuminate that qualitative inquiry is significant and can result in robust knowledge equal to more traditional statistical approaches to research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2013).

### **Grounded Theory Approach**

One of the most important aspects of grounded theory is that it is not intended to verify existing theories. The goal for Glaser and Strauss (1967) was to inductively arrive at theory

from data through comparative analysis. Verification is stressed as much as possible but only in the service of theory generation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is also stressed in the grounded theory method that the goal of generating theory is not to generate facts. The purpose is to identify concepts, or conceptual categories, to generate theory in an area of study in which theories do not exist or are inadequate for explaining a phenomenon. This generation of conceptual categories delimits the applicability of the categories and broadens the theory. This, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe, is so “that it is more generally applicable and has greater explanatory and predictive power” (p. 24). A crucial aspect of generating theory is not to force the data in to preconceived categories. Grounded theorists are not concerned with descriptive detail, but the process of seeing the data in new, abstract concepts through the constant comparative analysis of data (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007). This position is markedly different from that of many quantitative methods. The determination to conduct a grounded theory study allows the researcher an opportunity to “theorize how meanings, actions, and social structures are constructed” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 151). Rather than determining a hypothesis and seeking verification of such, the grounded theory methodology allows for discovery and the creation of analytic structure that contributes to the understanding of phenomenon and the furthering of empirical evidence.

### **Methodological Justification**

The essence of grounded theory is to discover relationships and categories in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This statement is supported by Charmaz (2006) with “grounded theory methods foster seeing your data in fresh ways and exploring your ideas about the data through early analytic writing” (p. 2). Grounded theory methodology allows for the responsiveness

of the researcher in understanding contextual situations of the participants and the data with memo writing being an essential role in the process.

Grounded theory is intended to create a new understanding of a phenomenon that cannot be captured quantitatively. Glaser and Strauss (1967) are very pointed in asserting that qualitative data, specifically the grounded theory method, can systematically and rigorously create theory that extends beyond speculation of ideas. This assertion is followed by the claim that researchers should use the most appropriate method for the task of inquiry and that qualitative methods are, at times, the only method of obtaining data about a phenomenon. In areas of nascent or intermediate research, Edmundson and McManus (2007) suggest the grounded theory methodology for exploratory research inquiries that can provide new insights and form a suggestive theory of a phenomenon that can develop a foundation for continued inquiry.

### **Qualitative Studies in Criminology**

While the study of crime saw its beginnings in the field of sociology, independent studies of crime and criminology are a fairly recent area of inquiry. Studies of crime have not benefitted from recent advances in other disciplines as a consequence of criminology's emergence as an independent field of study. It has been asserted that much of the qualitative data that has been used in criminology has failed to generate new theories. Qualitative data has suffered from being plugged in to preconceived theories, primarily from quantitative data, to support data sets (Miller, 2005). Miller (2005) expounds on how this phenomenon is especially prevalent in the area of qualitative methodologies "While there remains a divide within sociology between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and interpretive and positivist epistemologies, it is even more palpable within the discipline of criminology" (p. 1). The insulation of criminal



justice research from advancements, particularly in the field of sociology, is evidenced in academic journals. Representation of qualitative studies in criminal justice publications is disproportionately low (Tewksbury et al., 2010). Quantitative methods have dominated criminological studies. A lack of balance between quantitative and qualitative studies has hindered the theoretical advancement within the discipline (Tewksbury et al., 2010). Tewksbury et al. stress the importance of quantitative, along with rigorous qualitative, studies that can serve as a catalyst for continued advancement in the field of criminology.

Within the grounded theory methodology, an initial question is developed to study the phenomenon of a group and is derived from experiences or review of literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This initial question is provisional and does not remain static throughout the course of data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The interview question(s) may evolve throughout the data collection process. The evolution of the interview questions will be incumbent upon the emerging themes and categories through the constant comparative method. As interviews are conducted and categories begin to emerge, the interviews become a dynamic process as the interviewer asks questions that seek to further examine the phenomenon under study.

Interviews with offenders are described as being unique (Presser, 2010). Obtaining narratives from offenders can provide a contextual perspective of crime and offending that is unable to be captured in quantitative analysis. In referencing interviews with offenders to obtain qualitative data, Presser (2010) states

The objectified version of what people say about their own actions or those of others—arrest statistics and survey data—permits large numbers of observations. However, in-depth qualitative accounts about one's actions-stories-remain the very best data with which researchers might retrieve the meanings that people give to their own violations, including violations that state officials do not know or care about. Simply, our stories draw on the events, symbols, and phenomenological tensions that matter to us. (p. 431)

Questions of veracity arise as considerations; however, truthfulness of the narrative is not a central concern. Offenders typically recount the events and conditions surrounding the commission of a crime (Agnew, 2006). When recounting events and conditions, the interview process has the capability to also capture accounts of remembered perception and reaction to events leading to the commission of crime (Agnew, 2006).

Pertaining to partner violent men, it is well documented that recollections of partner abuse involve minimization, justifications, and victim-blaming when describing acts of abuse against an intimate partner (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002; Corvo et al., 2008; Dempsey & Day, 2011; Fenton & Rathus, 2011). This tendency is acknowledged by Presser (2010) with “The view of narrative as a shaper of experience has it that the plot or meaning of the story is conveyed not only through its content but also through its form” (p. 439). In essence, *how* the story is told provides data to be analyzed. The “passivizing structures” (Presser, 2010, p. 440), justifications and “neutralizations” (Agnew, 2006, p. 122) of the crime(s) committed all provide valuable content that are oftentimes in contrast with other recorded events, such as police reports and victim statements. An understanding of the conditions and events surrounding crime provides an opportunity to provide a more thorough understanding of crime in additions to social factors, such as poverty, lack of education, and joblessness, that have been attributed to the causes of crime. Narrowing the focus to that of partner violent men, narratives of abuse against an intimate partner can provide more breadth and depth to understanding intimate partner violence that can augment the current thought on the causes of domestic violence.

The methods of the study included the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria based upon geographic location within Ohio and the rationale for the proposed correctional institutions in which offenders are currently incarcerated. The interview processes will also be described.

This will be followed by an explanation of data preparation that will include interviews, transcription of the interviews and the coding processes. Lastly, I will develop the grounded theory methodological approach that will include data integration of the interview narratives.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

**Inclusionary and exclusionary criteria.** The dissertation process began with the examination of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria. For the purpose of completing the dissertation, the purposeful sampling of participants included male offenders serving a period of incarceration within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction currently operates within five security levels: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Levels 1 and 2 include those offenders who are typically within three years of release date or a parole hearing date. These two levels are comprised of inmates serving a period of incarceration for non-violent and violent offenses and are housed within a correctional institution that has more freedom of movement throughout normal operating hours. Inmates within the level 1 and 2 Ohio correctional institutions have few or no institutional rule infractions. Level 3 offenders are more likely or have engaged in disruptive prison behavior. Level 4 offenders are a higher security level than 3 and is designated for those offenders who have established histories of violent and/or disruptive behavior or there is a very high risk of escape. Security levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 were included in this study. Security level 5 was excluded from the study. Security level 5 designations are for those offenders who have established a more severe history of violent and/or disruptive behavior during incarceration. Limiting the scope of the study to Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 inmates provided for an array of offense convictions that are inclusive of domestic violence behavior since violent offenders who adhere to institutional rules can, and are often, housed in lower security institutions within Ohio.

There were four correctional institutions selected for the study that currently house Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 male inmates. Two proposed Level 1 and 2 correctional institutions and two Level 3 correctional institutions selected for the study. The Level 3 correctional institutions also housed the level 4 offenders that were included in this study. The correctional institutions selected are in the Northeast and Northwest regions of the state of Ohio. One of Ohio's correctional policies is to strive to house offenders within proximity of their families in an attempt to make it easier for offenders to maintain family relationships during incarceration; therefore the sample selection from the three Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 correctional institutions will allow for the sample to be representative of more than one region or area of Ohio that will include the five large urban areas, several mid-size cities, and many rural counties.

**Adherence to ethical guidelines.** Approval for this study was obtained from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's (ODRC) Human Subjects Review (HSR) committee (Appendix A). No compensation was provided to incarcerated offenders for participation in the study. Written informed consent was provided for each participant to agree or decline. (Please see Appendix B for full introductory statement in the informed consent as approved by ODRC's Human Subject's Review Committee.) Additionally, the informed consent was read to all participants to ensure they understood the meaning of informed consent. All participants were provided the opportunity to verbally decline. Approval was obtained from Antioch University Institutional Review Board upon receiving approval from the dissertation committee.

Anonymity was maintained for each participant. This study was conducted in accordance with the fundamentals of grounded theory methodology; therefore this is not a descriptive

analysis of the offenders who willingly participated. This measure was taken to ensure that any offender's with a high-profile criminal offense remained anonymous.

**Screening for the selection of study participants.** Inmates at the chosen institutions were screened by offense of conviction and offense behavior. When available, the pre-sentence investigation was reviewed to ensure that the offense of conviction was against an intimate partner. All offense behaviors of the participants in this study included: felonious assault, aggravated assault, failure to comply, aggravated arson, illegal manufacturing of chemicals, burglary, abduction, menacing by stalking, violation of a protection order, attempted murder, and murder.

A clear definition of domestic violence is warranted to definitively explain the parameters of the participants in the study. The Department of Justice defines domestic violence as

We define domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationships that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. (United States Department of Justice, 2015)

The definition of domestic violence as offered by the U.S. Department of Justice specifies domestic violence in the context of intimate relationships. For the purposes of this study, participants selected were those who have a history of perpetrating domestic violence against an intimate partner within the context of a heterosexual relationship. The intimate relationships considered for this study are in alignment with Chapter 3113 of the Ohio Revised Code, defining an intimate partner. Such relationships included: spouse, former spouse, a person living as a spouse (co-habiting) or previously living as a spouse, the natural parent of a child in which the participant is the other natural parent, and a person related by consanguinity.

Upon receiving appropriate approvals from the Antioch University's Institutional Review Board (HSR), as instructed by ODRC's HSR committee, I contacted the warden's assistants at the selected institutions, providing them with the name of the screened potential participant(s) to meet with and interview at each visit. More than one name of the potential participants was provided to increase the likelihood of interviewing at least one participant at each visit to the selected institutions. The warden's assistants serve as the public information officers at each correctional institution in Ohio. These individuals were notified of the approval from the HSR committee and for each correctional institution, I established a time and date to speak with the selected offenders.

### **Participants**

The purposeful selection of study participants were identified using three forms of identification and met at least one of the following criteria:

1. Men serving a sentence for convictions of domestic violence, menacing by stalking, and/or violation of a protection order.
2. Men recommended to complete the ODRC batterer's intervention program facilitated within three of the correctional institutions selected for this study.
3. Men serving a sentence for offenses against an intimate partner in which the offense of conviction was a higher felony level than domestic violence, menacing by stalking, or violation of a protection order.

All the men interviewed had convictions or offense behavior that was against a current or former intimate partner. This clarifying statement is necessary due to Ohio Revised Code (ORC) definition of domestic violence that can include persons other than an intimate partner.

**Demographics of interview participants.** This study included interviews with 15 incarcerated men in Ohio correctional institutions. The interviews were concluded upon saturation of the emergent theory. The participants in this study included a wide array of ages, ranging from 25 to 61 years old. The ethnic make-up of the men interviewed included: eight white, five black, and two Hispanic. The length of sentence for the study participants ranged from a 1.5-year sentence to serving a sentence of life with release dates ranging from two weeks to never. Regarding prior criminal behavior, six participants interviewed had no prior incarcerations. One participant had one prior incarceration and six participants had two prior incarcerations. One participant had four prior incarcerations and lastly, one participant had five prior incarcerations. One eligible participant declined the interview while one participant agreed to the interview but chose not to have the interview recorded. Table 3.1 lists the demographic and prior offense information of the men in the study.

Table 3.1

*Offender Demographics*

| Pseud.  | Age (at time of interview) | Race     | Offense                                                                                            | Sentence         | Number of Prior Adult Incarcerations |
|---------|----------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mike    | 61                         | Black    | Attempted Murder                                                                                   | 12 years         | None                                 |
| Phil    | 52                         | Black    | Murder                                                                                             | 15 years to Life | 5                                    |
| Ray     | 57                         | Black    | Menacing by Stalking                                                                               | 3 years          | 1                                    |
| Jason   | 25                         | Black    | Burglary; Aggravated Burglary; Menacing by Stalking; Abduction                                     | 4 years          | 2                                    |
| Ralph   | 55                         | Black    | Aggravated Murder                                                                                  | 25 years to Life | None                                 |
| Alex    | 36                         | Hispanic | Murder                                                                                             | 15 years to Life | None                                 |
| Ed      | 36                         | Hispanic | Domestic Violence; Menacing by Stalking                                                            | 3 years          | 2                                    |
| Matt    | 33                         | White    | Aggravated Assault; Illegal Manufacturing of Chemicals (2 counts); Illegal Possession of Chemicals | 6 years          | 2                                    |
| Andrew  | 25                         | White    | Domestic Violence (2 counts); Burglary; Attempted Felonious Assault; Robbery; Felonious Assault    | 4 Years          | 2                                    |
| Robert  | 41                         | White    | Domestic Violence; Violation of a Protection Order                                                 | 2 years          | 4                                    |
| Richard | 46                         | White    | Domestic Violence; Violation of a Protection Order                                                 | 1.5 years        | 2                                    |
| Greg    | 50                         | White    | Aggravated Arson (2 counts); Domestic Violence                                                     | 11.5 years       | 2                                    |
| Dan     | 53                         | White    | Domestic Violence (2 counts)                                                                       | 3 years          | None                                 |
| Joe     | 55                         | White    | Murder                                                                                             | 15 years to Life | None                                 |
| Keith   | 52                         | White    | Attempted Murder; Domestic Violence; Felonious Assault; Failure to Comply                          | 22.5 years       | None                                 |

**Interviews With Study Participants**

Qualitative methods of data collection are oftentimes gathered through the process of interviews. Interviews are also a source of data collection for the grounded theory methodology. One-on-one interviewing is not a one-sided conversation; rather, it is a meaningful interaction



between the interviewer and the interviewee (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2007). The interview can be semi-structured or unstructured. In both styles, the interviewer is responsible for building a rapport and setting a tone of mutuality during the interview. This requires eye contact, acknowledgement, appropriate affect, and full engagement with the interviewee. As in conversation, the interview should not end abruptly but should come to a natural close with allowing the interviewee to ask questions of the researcher. The qualitative research interview is much more than asking who, what, when, where, or why. The grounded theorist seeks more than facts. “Grounded theorists search for different forms and aspects of a situation until patterns emerge” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 145). Strauss and Corbin (1990) offer guidance in explaining that this unstructured interview can focus on interactional, organizational, or biographical processes.

**Grounded theory interviews.** Interviews were conducted from the group of selected participants with offenses of conviction that were related to incidents against an intimate partner. The foreshadowed questions explain the intent of the study and the initial question to the unstructured interviews with offenders was

*I would like to ask about your family relationships. Where would you like to start?*

After introducing myself to each eligible participant, I explained the focus of the study. After answering questions about the study, I read the consent form and provided them an opportunity to participate or decline. The initial follow up question to the introductory statement of asking the interview participant where they would like to start in the discussion of their family relationships was intended to serve as a protective measure. In the instance that the interview participant had prior problematic family relationships, this allowed the participant to approach such experiences in a manner that was suitable and safe to the participant. The opening statement

and subsequent open-ended questions allowed for exploration of relational experiences including childhood and familial relationships and provided an opportunity for the offender to discuss current or pre-incarceration intimate relationships and the meanings he attached to family and romantic relationships. The sensitizing concepts relevant to the interviews were: How men explain the origin of their violence; their understanding of individual development; exposure to violence in the family of origin; chronicity of violence experienced. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to two hours in length. Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was obtained.

***Reflections on the interviews.*** In considering the initial introduction of myself and the study with each of the offenders, I considered it ethically necessary to explain that I was focusing on offenders with a history of violence against an intimate partner. It is accepted in the IPV literature that men minimize, rationalize, and justify their abuses, particularly physical abuse, against their intimate partner(s) (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002; Bancroft, 2002). In an attempt to counter any immediate defenses that may have arisen from introducing the study, I explained to each offender that this study was intended to focus on men and the experiences of men. I clarified how I was interested in their early life experiences and meaningful relationships throughout their life, particularly early relationships. An important statement made to each potential interviewee was “I’m interested in hearing about your life experiences and your story.” I discussed the importance of maintaining confidentiality for those who chose to participate. Upon explaining the confidentiality, I asked each potential interviewee if I had permission to call them by their first name. The reactions of the men were unexpected: The men readily agreed to permitting me to refer to them using their first name.

It is significant to understand that within the prison culture, it is common practice for staff to address inmates by their last name or their inmate number. If a last name is used to address an inmate, it may or may not include “Mr.” prior to addressing an offender. When interacting with staff members, oftentimes the first question a staff member will ask an offender is “what is your number?,” meaning their assigned inmate number. Such a question often precedes asking an offender for their last name. In relation to conducting the interviews for this study, when asking the potential participants if I had permission to refer to them by their first name in an effort to maintain confidentiality, many of the men responded positively to such a question. One eligible participant who agreed to be interviewed remarked “I haven’t been called by my first name in over 11 years. It sounds good to hear my name again.” Another replied “Wow. Yes.” Asking potential interviewees for their permission to call them by their first name and subsequently referring to them by first name throughout the interview provided an element of acceptance, respect, and dignity.

Another interesting phenomenon existed primarily in the higher security institutions. The first potential interviewee in one of the higher security prisons was escorted to an area in which many prison executive staff are in close proximity. Such staff consisted of Lieutenants, Captains, and Deputy Warden. These positions are considered security positions as opposed to other positions often referred to as treatment positions. Upon seeing the first potential interviewee in the waiting area of the operations department of the high security institution, I introduced myself prior to entering a separate room. This offender immediately asked “What is this? What’s this about?” I readily explained to him that he was not in any trouble or being investigated for anything; however he quickly asked again “Then what’s this for?” I invited the potential interviewee into a conference room in which there were no windows, therefore the door

was to remain open for safety and security reasons. The inmate agreed to be interviewed while refusing to have the interview recorded, stating “I don’t trust this.” Upon asking him if he was sure it was acceptable to proceed, he stated it was acceptable. Throughout the interview, this interviewee kept looking at the digital recorder sitting on the table. After a few long glances at the recorder, I asked him if he wished to see it. He then stated that he didn’t trust that I wasn’t recording the interview. After asking him if he wished to discontinue the interview, I handed him the digital recorder and showed him what it looked like when it was recording and what it looked like when it was not recording. I explained to him that leaving the recorder on the table and keeping it visible to him was an attempt for him to see that I was not secretly recording the interview. As we continued with the interview, he did not glance at the recorder again. This experience led me to strategize with the Warden’s Assistant to determine a more neutral place for the interviews to occur. We decided I would hold the subsequent interviews in a private room in the visiting area. This allowed the interviewees to be more relaxed. Within the correctional institution, the general culture for offenders is to not be seen in the executive staff area or talking to executive staff for fear of being labeled a “snitch” or being sent to a restrictive housing area. The following interviews at this higher security institution were held in a private room, surrounded by glass, in the visiting area. This allowed for the men to “save face” by not being called to the executive area of the prison while still providing privacy for the interview.

In the lower security institutions, I followed the same style of introduction. The interviews in the lower security institutions were conducted in an office that typically had a chair, a desk, and a more comfortable chair a staff member typically occupies. After meeting the offender and introducing myself, I offered them to sit down in the comfortable chair while I sat

in the chair typically occupied by inmates. All of the inmates in the lower security institutions had reactions of disbelief in offering them the comfortable chair.

Knowledge of the prison culture was an important consideration for conducting the interviews. Providing a comfortable chair, use of their first name, and using a neutral location were all intended to create sense of trust for the inmate while maintaining my safety.

### **Data Preparation**

The iterative processes of data collection, coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling guided the grounded theory methodology. I employed a transcriptionist to type the recorded interviews for data analysis. The last names of the men interviewed were not stated during the interview process, therefore anonymity of the study participants was maintained in the transcription process. Additionally, a coding team was assembled and was made up of a fellow Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership & Change students to provide thorough, unbiased analysis of the data. Initial coding was done independently by both members of the coding team. Virtual meetings occurred weekly to discuss and compare coding structures, memos, and emerging themes.

**Coding the data.** The readings on grounded theory stress the importance of data analysis in setting grounded theory apart from other qualitative methods of inquiry. Data analysis in the grounded theory methodology does not follow a sequential or linear path. Unique to grounded theory is the iterative process of data collection and data analyses. As data are gathered, they are analyzed, setting the course for further data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process is explained by Kelle (2013), who stated “researchers must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories” (p. 197). In the process of open coding, the coding team should be asking what the data suggests and from the perspective

of whom. Seeing how others understand their situation in the topic of study brings new perspective and insight to the coding process and aids in restricting the coding to align only with pre-existing notions or theory (Charmaz, 2006). It is suggested to engage, study, and interact with the data, particularly in the beginning stages of coding, to mine for analytic and conceptual ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), remembering that the initial codes are provisional. Studying and interacting with the data is examined by Gibbs (2010), explaining that you compare the data with other data. Concepts that seem to significantly relate to each other are grouped together, exploring all possible meanings of it. After exploration of the word or phrase, validation occurs through comparison with other data.

Nothing should be taken for granted in the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gibbs 2010). Phrases and words such as “never” and “always” are said to be indicators of social processes (Gibbs, 2010); therefore, interviewers should seek clarification of such phrases and terms expressed to preserve the experiences of participants and increase the ability to understand implicit meanings.

The coding process was iterative, meaning that each interview was coded prior to moving forward with the next interview. The coding was conducted by a coding partner and I. Correspondence occurred weekly via Google chat and throughout the week as necessary. Coding was conducted individually then compared during the weekly video call. As interview data increased, segments of data were compared with other interview data. As a result, new understandings and insights emerged resulting in the creation of themes. The software used in the collection and coding of data was NVivo 11. This software allowed the data to be stored, analyzed, re-analyzed, and provided for the creation of memos.

In reviewing the seminal and second generation writings on grounded theory methodology, it is important to note that engagement in the different types of coding is not a linear process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While Strauss and Corbin proceed to axial coding after the initial coding of data, Charmaz (2006) refers to the next step in her coding process as focused. In this focused phase of the coding process, the coding team studies the data and the meanings associated with such data. Numerous categories were created in the initial coding process and the focused coding provided further conceptualization of the data.

**Axial coding.** Furthering the open coding process is axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding is described as putting the data back together in conceptual ways and making connections between categories and the establishment of subcategories (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this phase, the coding team endeavors to specify a category, determine the conditions of that category, and the conditions that give rise to such category. This stage of coding is more precise and goes beyond description by explaining what is happening in the area being studied (Holton, 2007). Axial coding was conducted once themes began to emerge in the data. It is emphasized, once again, that the stages of coding are not discrete processes. “Though open and axial coding are distinct analytical procedures, when the researcher is actually engaged in analysis he or she alternates between the two modes” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 98). As the conceptual categories begin to emerge, theoretical sampling and comparative analysis served to generate and verify the emerging concepts. This higher level of coding was integrative and “sufficiently generalized” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 38), setting a foundation for generating theory, or theoretical coding.

## **Theoretical Sampling and Saturation**

Theoretical sampling is the process of collecting, coding, and analyzing data in an effort to determine what data to collect next as the theory emerges (Covan, 2013). This description of theoretical sampling is enhanced with “As such, the process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory” (Holton, 2007, p. 278). The data are “grounded” in the lived experiences of others as grounded theorists analyze the data collected. The analysis of data is referred to as comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and serves to generate theory through the discovery process. Such theoretical sampling emerging from data analysis may enrich the generated conceptual understandings or disconfirm them. Once an interview is completed, the grounded theory researcher then engages in the process of initial coding, or open coding, described as the preliminary breaking down of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Holton, 2007). The initial interviews consisted mostly of men serving long sentences for offense of extreme violence. To broaden the scope of the interviews, men convicted of lesser violent IPV-related offenses were included in the sampling in an attempt to provide depth to or discover potential differences in offenses of conviction. Upon analysis and coding, broadening the scope of interviewees resulted in providing depth to the emergent themes.

Saturation is achieved through conducting more interviews and considering the theoretical sampling in an effort to saturate the emerging theoretical concepts as opposed to testing a pre-determined hypothesis. Themes began to emerge and with continued theoretical sampling and constant comparative analyses, interview data saturated the meanings of the theoretical concepts that were discovered. Comparative analysis has been described as the backbone of the category building (Kelle, 2013) and provides the basis for coding.



Sample selection for the grounded theory study is markedly different than sample selection for quantitative and other qualitative studies. Such differentiation was made clear in Glaser and Strauss's (1967) description of the core fundamental of grounded theory: theory emergence. As preliminary categories emerged, the process of sample selection was refined. The initial interviews began with the majority of the men serving long sentences, the shortest sentence being 15 years to life, with 16 years having been served at the time of the interview. Of those that were serving shorter sentences, such as a two-year sentence, similar themes emerged.

After conducting eight interviews, it was determined to balance the interviews with men serving long sentences with the men serving shorter sentences. Seven of the men interviewed are serving long sentences, no less than eleven years, while the remaining men interviewed are serving sentences of six years or less. It is interesting to note that the majority of the men serving long sentences are currently residing in Level 1 and 2 correctional institutions while the men serving shorter sentences had a greater range and were being housed in Levels 1 through 4 security institutions.

Aside from the random sampling used in experimental designs, many researchers select their study sample based on as many common characteristics as possible. Additionally, within many quantitative studies, researchers attempt to control for variables among a study population to narrow the scope of variability for description and verification. Within a grounded theory design, limited variability is described to "hinder the generation of theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 51). Variability within the grounded theory study assists in the development of properties, provides for understanding diverse conditions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and assists in refining major categories (Charmaz, 2006). Variability of the data was achieved within this

subset of incarcerated offenders. Sentence length, age, race, and offense of conviction were varied as much as possible in an attempt to generate theory.

The use of theoretical sampling is not a pre-determined set of guidelines to be used prior to the onset of a study (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This concept is thoroughly described by Charmaz (2006) in her statement “Initial sampling in grounded theory is where you start whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go” (p. 100). Once a group of study has been chosen and the method of data collection has been determined, data is gathered widely at the initial sampling stage in an effort to generate as many categories as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of sampling is cumulative, that is, the discovery of concepts in the data collection and analysis reveal major categories that direct the grounded theorist in expanding the breadth and depth of a core category to seek density of the category while remaining flexible (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Flexibility refers to the ability to further expound upon an area that is appearing to be significant in the data that may have been unforeseen (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The balance of maintaining consistency and discovery of new concepts is critical in the process of theoretical sampling. This process is not arbitrary or disorganized. Rather, it is purposeful and based upon emergent themes and categories found in the ongoing data analysis.

Theoretical sampling and data collection continues until no new categories or conditions are found in the data. This is referred to as saturation and serves as the validation for the newly discovered conceptual categories and theoretical findings. It is in the process of obtaining saturation that the grounded theory researcher seeks verification. Verification in grounded theory is data compared to data as opposed to verification of a pre-existing theory. Saturation was achieved in this study that consisted of 15 interviews.

The data collection, data analysis, and theoretical sampling all occur in conjunction with one another and guides the processes of each. It is stressed that such processes are critical for the grounded theory researcher. “Without constant comparative analyses, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation, you lose the power of the method” (Hood, 2013, p. 152). Authors of the grounded theory methodology stress that the coding process is not linear or a discrete stage in the process of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Memo Writing**

Memo writing serves as an integral process in the grounded theory methodology (Lembert, 2013). A definition offered by Strauss and Corbin (1990) states that memos are “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory” (p. 197). Just as the coding progressions evolve throughout the grounded theory processes, memo writing also evolves from the initial open coding process to the final stage of the study. The purpose of memo writing is to record progress, ideas, and conceptualizations. Memo writing allows multiple ideas to be generated and guides the researcher to engage with the data to take the data beyond descriptions in to conceptualizations (Lembert, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Memo writing begins as a simple process and early memos are speculative and often incomplete because they capture first impressions, thoughts, and directions as they assist in the creative process (Lempert, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Early memos are also described as awkward, messy and can be a source of stress and confusion for the novice grounded theorist; however memos are a distinct process in the grounded theory methodology and are never to be omitted (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) because the final study will lack density and abstract theory. Like other aspects of grounded theory methodology, the creation of memos is not undertaken with a pre-determined stance (Birks, Chapman, & Frances, 2008). It is the engagement with the

data whereby memos are created and provide a mechanism for the researcher to preserve ideas, thoughts, and further direction of the study being undertaken.

Memo writing provides an historic account of how the grounded theory study began and aids in the explaining how and why decisions were made throughout the process. The memos lead the researcher, particularly in the early stages of the research process, to question the meanings of the data (Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2006). “The result is the generation of theoretical assertions that are grounded in raw data, yet possess the quality of conceptual abstraction” (Birks et al., 2008, p. 71).

As the grounded theory study progresses, memos assist the researcher in going beyond description and moving into abstract concepts that remain true to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This, according to Strauss and Corbin, provides the ability to distinguish when a category or concept is not fully developed. This is described as “fracturing” the data in preparation for the creation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

While the description of memos by Glaser and Strauss (1967) are very theoretical, second generation and current grounded theorists provide practical advice for the creation and use of memos. Strauss and Corbin (1990) advise that memos should be orderly, progressive, systematic, and easily retrievable. For organized retrieval, it is suggested that each memo contain the date of creation, a reference from where the memo was created, and should contain reference to the concept or category it is related to (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Writing memos within the data, such as transcripts and field notes, is strongly discouraged with the explanation that doing so can cause the distinctions between raw data and researcher conceptualizations indiscrete (Birks et al., 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is also recommended that memos remain conceptual in nature with the inclusion of short quotes or phrases from the raw data as a

reference to where the memo idea originated from. Memos were created upon initial coding of the data and continued to be created throughout the multiple levels of coding. Memos were used to record offender responses, affect during the interview, and ideas that were generated during the coding processes.

Differentiation in the type of memo writing is suggested throughout the progress of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The differentiation of memos is also suggested by Birks et al. (2008) and their suggestions correspond with those of Strauss and Corbin. Memos primarily take three forms that include: operational memos, coding memos, and theoretical memos. Operational memos outline the steps taken throughout each stage of the study. These memos include justifications of how and why decisions were made throughout the grounded theory process. Coding memos provide a record of the detailed exploration of the coding and categorization processes (Birks et al., 2008). The coding memos serve in the reconstruction of the data and serve as an integral process for linking the conditions and variations of the emergent categories. This process is described by Lempert (2013) as reconstructing the data into an “integrated whole.” Lempert’s description of the coding memo begins to overlap with the description of theoretical memos described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) whereby Strauss and Corbin describe the theoretical memo as the process of asking questions about the other properties and dimensions of a category. This uncertainty and overlap does not serve as a point of confusion as Strauss and Corbin describe the non-distinct evolution of memo writing, particularly from open coding to axial coding. The theoretical memos provide direction for theoretical sensitivity and theoretical sampling.

All forms and purposes of memos improve the quality and conceptualization of the study (Lempert, 2013) and allows for distance from the data to improve conceptualizations. Lastly,

Birks et al. (2008) assert that the creation of memos throughout the entirety of the study will find that this critical investment will result in clarity in the final stages of the writing.

Memos were created at all stages of the data collection and coding processes. As themes emerged, new memos were created as some initial memos were dismissed.

### **Explanatory Matrices**

Explanatory matrices were created using dimensional analysis to discern “what all is going on” with the data collected (Schatzman, 1991). An explanatory matrix was used to make sense of participants’ understanding of the conditions under which theirs and others social interactional processes emerged and the consequences of these processes on themselves, others, and the phenomenon itself. The data was coded, sorted, and reassembled in to explanatory matrices in an effort reconstruct the data in search of the core and primary dimensions. As is with the coding process, the creation of preliminary explanatory matrices was iterative and exploratory until categories emerged from the data. A final explanatory matrix was determined to best explain the meaning that these men brought to their experiences with intimate relationships and violence.

### **Summary**

The third chapter describes the purpose of the study as an inquiry to further understanding the etiology of intimate partner violence as perpetrated by incarcerated men. With the majority of the literature of abusive men addressing community or probation populations, this study will contribute to the extant literature of understanding partner violent men who serve a period of incarceration.

The grounded theory approach to this study provides a foundation that is absent of preconceived theories pertaining to this population and allows for the possibility of gaining new

insight to understanding partner violent men and the potential for more effective treatment options for men during incarceration.

### **Findings of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence and to illuminate how incarcerated men describe the etiology of their abusive behavior. Interview data from 15 participants were analyzed using dimensional analyses. The interviews with incarcerated men resulted in the gathering of rich, contextualized data. Although the sample size was relatively small, in grounded theory method the focus is on the saturation of conceptual categories that contribute to emerging theoretical propositions. “For both Glaser and Strauss, small samples and limited data do not pose problems because grounded theory methods aim to develop conceptual categories and thus data collection is directed to illuminate properties of a category and relations between categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). The sample selected reflected a wide array of offenses, age, race/ethnicity, past criminal behavior, and length of sentence in an effort to increase the breadth and depth of the collected data (see Table 3.1).

To ensure and continue the scientific approach in the grounded theory methodology, Shatzman (1991) formulated the process of dimensional analysis to guide the analysis of qualitative data. Dimensional analysis is a more deliberate process than categorizing the data. Dimensional analysis seeks to find “what is going on here” (Schatzman, 1991) in the data. The purpose of dimensional analysis is to generate theory by seeking the underlying meanings and cognitive processes used to interpret, understand, and respond to a phenomenon (Kools, McCarthy, Durham, & Robrecht, 1996). Embedded in symbolic interactionism (Benson & Holloway, 2005), dimensions are concepts constructed from the data, arrived at through a deconstruction of the interview data, then followed through with a process of conceptual re-construction (Kools et al., 1996). Dimensionality provides understanding of the complexity of



a phenomenon demanding inquiry into the context, processes, and interconnectedness (Schatzman, 1991). Within the process of dimensional analysis, conceptual categories are established along with the properties of each category. A core dimension is established and is integral to the established primary dimensions (Kools et al., 1996).

This chapter will provide an overview of the dimensional analyses with an explanation of the core dimension, primary dimensions, and detailed descriptions of each conceptual category within these dimensions. Quotes from the interview participants will be included in order to illustrate the conceptual categories. All interview participants signed consent forms, indicating the use of their first name only. Uncommon names, lengthy names, and the names of high-profile offenders were altered to protect each participant's anonymity.

### **Overview of Primary Dimensions and Conceptual Categories**

One core dimension and five primary dimensions with their related conceptual categories emerged from the interviews. Table 4.1 shows that the core dimension of loss occurred in contexts of childhood and adulthood. The conceptual categories related to loss further describe the nature of the loss experienced by the participants.

In conducting the analysis, the core dimension that emerged was Loss as described by the participants. The discovery of a dimension that becomes elevated to the status of core dimension is defined by Schatzman (1991) as "The dimension that provides the greatest explanation for the relationship among dimensions is ultimately selected as the central or key perspective from which to organize or 'choreograph' the data" (p. 303). Thus, loss is central to the primary dimensions. The higher level conceptual categories associated with the core dimension of Loss expanded on the meaning of Loss in the experiences of the male participants. These categories

were comprised of: Loss of Parent, Loss of Intimate Partner, Immediate Loss, and Patterned Loss.

The primary dimensions are organized around the core dimension of loss and consist of: Seeking, Overcoming, Controlling, Disengaging, and Blaming (see Table 4.1). Each of the primary dimensions is further described by conceptual categories that occur within the context of childhood, adulthood, and incarceration. Table 4.1 lists the organization of the conceptual categories in relation to the primary dimension. For example, the primary dimension of seeking is comprised of the following conceptual categories: Seeking Help, Seeking Relationships, and Seeking Religion/Faith. Table 4.1 also aligns the primary dimension and its related conceptual categories to the context in which the participants experienced them. For example, the conceptual categories for disengaging included different experiences in childhood and adulthood. Similarly, each primary dimension has its own unique set of conceptual categories that occur during childhood, adulthood, or during incarceration. I will begin the presentation of findings with the core dimension of Loss as all other dimensions are touched by its meaning.

Table 4.1

*Primary Dimensions and Conceptual Categories***CONTEXT: INCARCERATED MEN WITH A HISTORY OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

| <b>Primary Dimensions</b> |                          | <b>Conceptual Categories</b> |                              |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Loss*</b>              |                          |                              |                              |
| Childhood Loss            | Loss of Parent           | Immediate Loss               | Patterned Loss               |
| Adulthood Loss            | Loss if Intimate Partner | Immediate Loss               | Patterned Loss               |
| <b>Seeking</b>            |                          |                              |                              |
| Childhood Seeking         | Help                     | Relationships                | Religion/Faith               |
| Adulthood Seeking         | Help                     | Relationships                | Religion/Faith               |
| During Incarceration**    | Help                     | Relationships                | Religion/Faith               |
| <b>Disengaging</b>        |                          |                              |                              |
| Childhood Disengaging     | Being Alone              | Drugs/Alcohol                | Quitting                     |
| Adulthood Disengaging     | Being Alone/Leaving      | Drugs/Alcohol                | Infidelity/Cheating          |
| <b>Controlling</b>        |                          |                              |                              |
| Childhood Controlling     | Not having Control       | Controlling situations       |                              |
| Adulthood Controlling     | Not having Control       | Controlling situations       | Controlling Intimate Partner |

**Blaming**

|                   |         |         |        |         |
|-------------------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| Childhood Blaming | Parents |         |        |         |
| Adulthood Blaming | Parents | Partner | Victim | Society |

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**Overcoming**

|                      |      |               |                      |                    |
|----------------------|------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Childhood Overcoming | Rage | Social Status | Being Good to Others | Perception of Self |
| Adulthood Overcoming | Rage | Social Status | Being Good to Others | Perception of Self |

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\*Loss is the core or central dimension of the primary dimensions

\*\* During Incarceration added in Seeking Primary Category due to the density of data provided

### **Core Dimension: Loss**

The core dimension of loss is the construct that is foundational to all the primary dimensions and most illustrative in understanding “what *all* is going on” with incarcerated men who have a history of intimate partner violence. Loss was prevalent with all the participants and best described participants’ lived experiences pertaining to intimate relationships in both childhood, adulthood, and during incarceration. The conceptual categories that more fully elucidate the meaning of loss for these participants are: loss of a parent and loss of intimate partner whether this loss occurred suddenly or was a series or a pattern of loss in relationships.

Within the context of childhood, many of the men disclosed an immediate and significant loss of a parent that included divorce, abandonment, or death through suicide. As one participant said, “My mom committed suicide when I was little. It was the day before my third birthday.” (Matt). Another described how he found out his mother had left when he was nine years old.

So she (sister) came over and she read the letters and I don’t even know if I understood, but just the emotions I probably just started crying or something, I don’t know. It was just out of the blue. (Joe)

Others described parental relationship loss during childhood that included being adopted or never knowing one of his parents, typically the biological father.

Single mom, she had addiction issues since I was a kid. Didn’t see my dad when I was growing up. I saw him when I was like 22. He ain’t done anything for me. (Jason).

When asked if his biological father was in his life, another participant illustrated the emotional impact of not seeing his father since childhood.

No. Not since I was about ten. And then it was for a week. I went to his place in (City X) and after that, nothing. Yeah, it bothers me. It bothers me a lot. Like almost like it’s my fault, but I know it’s not. I didn’t do anything. I was just a kid. (Robert)

When asked about his relationship with his mother during childhood, Robert explained how he would witness domestic violence in the home and how he stepped in to assist his mother during a violent encounter with his stepfather. “Well, I don’t know. I am kind of angry about my childhood. I got kicked out for sticking up for my mom.” This interviewee concluded with, “What did I do to not have a dad in my life?”

Participants recounted significant feelings of abandonment and confusion in the loss of their parent at a young age. Whether the loss was immediate, as in the sudden death of a parent, or a pattern of loss in which the parent was never or scarcely in their life, the participants described vividly the circumstances of the parent’s departure and their sense of powerlessness and guilt in the face of such abandonment.

The men interviewed also spoke about the loss of their intimate partner in adulthood. As with childhood, there were instances of sudden loss of an intimate partner. A number of the men gave an account of their inability to handle relationship difficulties. Their stories described a chronicity of relational difficulties, particularly with the intimate partner. These difficulties included criminal, addictive, and promiscuous behaviors that often involved one or both partners in the relationship. For example, they reported theirs or their partner’s substance abuse, children with multiple women, and a criminal lifestyle that included selling drugs and violence against others. Many of the men acknowledged that their acts of betrayal and mistrust of the intimate partner contributed to relational difficulties. Betrayals typically included serial infidelity and/or accusing the intimate partner of infidelity. However, betrayal might be perceived for lesser provocations, for example, if intimate partner expressed dissatisfaction with their criminal lifestyle, such as selling drugs, they were deeply offended and felt the partner was rejecting

them. Increased and enduring conflict in the relationship was a common consequence of perceived betrayal.

Yeah, because we looked good on the surface but then if something came up, like after I had my one-night-stand, we battled ten years. Everything was ruined. I mean, there was no trust and I was . . . (Joe)

Some of the interviewees recognized how their actions facilitated the loss experience.

After Joe disclosed that his first one-night-stand resulted in a lack of trust in his marriage, he reflects on the loss of intimacy and trust between he and his wife. “I look back and say I destroyed my own f@cking self and my own family” (Joe). While some of the participants accepted responsibility for the loss of relationship or crucial elements of the relationship, others did not. Some of the men denied the offense, abuse, and all accountability for the losses experienced in their adult intimate relationships. The respondent serving a 22- year sentence for multiple offenses against his wife, including attempted murder, illustrates this lack of accountability best. “I don’t know how I got here. And I can’t really think of any other decision I could have made” (Keith). Another described his immediate reaction of attempting to take the life of the intimate partner as a reaction to the loss of the relationship. “I was angry and I didn’t think. I didn’t think about all the consequences” (Mike).

The men’s experience of loss and their reaction to such loss was an ongoing pattern that began in childhood and continued into adulthood. They portrayed the loss experiences within the context of childhood as immediate, confusing, traumatic, and beyond their control. Their stories of adulthood losses were centered on the loss of an intimate partner.

### **Primary Dimensions**

The primary dimensions describe the men’s reactions to loss and thus are tightly bound to the core dimension. The five primary dimensions that emerged in the analysis were: Seeking, blaming, disengaging, controlling, and overcoming. The primary dimension of seeking is

comprised of the following conceptual categories: Seeking Help, Seeking Relationships, and Seeking Religion/Faith. Likewise, the conceptual categories for the disengaging primary dimension are: Being Alone/Leaving, Using Drugs & Alcohol, Quitting, and Infidelity/Cheating. Controlling, as a primary dimension, includes the conceptual categories of: Not Having Control, Controlling Situations, and Controlling Intimate Partner. Blaming was another primary dimension that emerged. Within this dimension, the conceptual category of Blaming Parents will include the properties of childhood. Blaming in adulthood also includes the conceptual categories of: Parents, Partner, Victim, and Society. Lastly, the primary dimension of overcoming includes the following conceptual categories: Rage, Social Status, Being Good to Others, and Perception of Self. Within each of these conceptual categories, the contexts of childhood and adulthood are referenced. The next section will describe each primary dimension, their conceptual categories and the contexts in which they occurred.

**Seeking.** The three conceptual categories that emerged within the seeking dimension are seeking: help, relationships, and religion/faith. Each of these conceptual categories deepened the meaning of seeking behaviors in these men's lives and illuminated the diverse avenues they sought to fill the void that early losses left.

**Seeking help.** Many of the men related how their efforts in seeking help to overcome the stress in their lives were only occasionally helpful but more likely disappointing. Primarily during their teenage years, the men reported formal and informal methods of help seeking. The formal methods of help-seeking consisted primarily of attending counseling sessions. Unfortunately, from their perspective, the sessions offered little or no assistance with their childhood struggles within the family.

I felt like people didn't understand what I was going through and it would affect my school grades. My mom wouldn't understand what was going on with me. I would



daydream a lot and I just had a hard time concentrating. I remember seeing guidance counselors a lot in sixth, seventh and eighth grade, but it didn't help out. It went into a downward spiral, all the way into high school where I just started cutting classes. (Alex)

The men also reflected on engaging in informal help seeking behavior in an attempt to understand their childhood dilemmas. Mostly occurring in adolescence, informal help seeking consisted of discussing confusion about family conflict with someone known to them. One interviewee recollected an inability to understand his father's assumed disinterest in his activities by asking his girlfriend's mother for her input when he was a teenager.

Through high school, I played football, baseball, basketball. So first like seventh and eighth grade he was involved, he (father) was watching all baseball and stuff and then in high school. And then the more my stepmother and I battled, the more I guess she told him or whatever, I don't know, but he stopped coming —He just stopped showing up. I mean, it was tough. Because things that your friends used to ask my friend's mom like, "What the hell am I doing? I don't drink, I don't smoke, I'm excelling in sports. What, because I have a girlfriend or a girl calls the house or something like that? What the hell?" She's like, "I don't know." She just couldn't figure it out either. So that was rough. (Joe)

Yet another interviewee who reported experiencing conflict with his former stepfather decidedly went to the source of his confusion. As a teenager, he spoke with his former stepfather, seeking help in understanding why abuse occurred in the home. "Well, I confronted my stepfather about being abusive" (Keith). Keith described that the conversation with his stepfather was enlightening and recalled that this method of seeking help provided him with a better understanding of the family conflicts during his earlier childhood.

Help seeking measures were pursued in adulthood and consisted of formal counseling. Such measures were an attempt to repair the intimate relationship. One participant shared that he and his wife sought counseling for marital troubles due to his repeated infidelities. His recalled perception of the counseling was that of the counselor addressing his wife. He recalls that his wife was offended by the counselor and that it brought no resolution to conflict-ridden marriage.

Then when we decided let's try counseling after ten years of this path, that really didn't help because the counselor was basically talking to her of what could she have done and she got offended about it. She got mad like, "He's the one who f@cking cheated on me and you're talking to me." (Joe)

Another interviewee convicted of attempted murder, claiming he was never abusive to his wife, recalled how formal counseling measures did not help the intimate relationship. Rather, he believed the counseling resulted in the navy (he was in service at the time), the counselor, and family services being against him.

So the navy is against me, the organization that got her into counseling that said that she's really troubled and all this we can't disclose specifics because confidentiality but you need to get out of this relationship, yadda yadda yadda, blah blah blah, call Family Services. All of a sudden Family Services gets called, I'm at fault. (Keith)

Seeking help during incarceration was also prevalent. The men who sought help reportedly found assistance in understanding themselves. Whereas others interviewed discussed not wanting to seek or accept help during incarceration, "There's nothing I want to know about. Jail is a college for criminals" (Jason), others shared how they accepted help during incarceration, which allowed them to gain insight into their past behavior.

Because I've noticed changes in my life since I actually started participating with psychiatrists and counselors, and Thinking for a Change programs and stuff like that. I'm able to identify a lot of the things going on with me now, and identify emotions instead of just being overwhelmed. That brings me relief. (Andrew)

The interview participants reported help seeking measures in adulthood outside of prison as unsuccessful. Whereas the men accepting and utilizing formal help measures while incarcerated gave them some assistance. The process of accepting help during incarceration could be due to the men attempting to engage in activities that help them "do their time" or that counselors within correctional institutions are more experienced in treating criminal behaviors.

***Seeking relationships.*** Participants in the study consistently spoke of seeking relationships within the contexts of childhood, adulthood and incarceration. During childhood,

the men spoke predominantly of seeking a father figure. “I think I was always looking for a father figure. When I was hanging out with John all the time, he was teaching me—he was very smart. He was just a geek-like nerd and he would teach me math” (Alex). As the interviewees spoke about seeking relationships during their teenage years, they continued to seek male companionship, often with their girlfriend’s father “I became good friends with her dad, we started golfing together” (Matt).

Relationship seeking during the teenage years also included that of a brotherhood, oftentimes an older group of males. “Yeah, I made a determination I didn’t want anything to do with my family so I started running away all the time. I was in and out of detention homes. I was using drugs started running with older crowds” (Matt). Another participant explained how he felt successful in establishing relationships with an older crowd. “I think I did have a sense of belonging back then with the older crowd, yeah. People who were much older than I was, I used to hang out with them all the time” (Alex).

Seeking father figures remained important in adulthood. In this context, the process was predominantly centered on a girlfriend’s father and family. “We would spend every Saturday with her dad and his family. He was remarried and we would always be there and I would play pool in the basement and I would have a couple of beers with her dad” (Alex).

Concerning intimate relationships, men discussed how having a close bond with an intimate partner was significant to them. While some inmates were unable to explain why, one was sure that bond was critical. “I don’t know, me being in a relationship is important to me. I don’t know why” (Robert). Others were more insightful: “I was looking for somebody that I could relate to” (Keith). It is interesting to contrast Robert and Keith’s comments about intimate relationships. In the course of the interview with Keith, he spoke frequently of seeking

friendships and expressed being deliberate and reflective on what he hopes for in an intimate relationship. Robert, however, never spoke of having friends or expressed any qualities he hoped to find in an intimate relationship. It appeared, from the interview, that Robert's relationships occurred by happenstance rather than being intentional.

Serving a period of incarceration includes limited or no access with the outside world. Oftentimes, relationships have been broken prior to being sentenced due to lifestyles, violence, or the loved one's discovery of deception that became known during the course of a trial. Many offenders, having severed relationships or not having healthy relationships, seek to re-establish former or new relationships while serving a period of incarceration. During incarceration, relationships often take the form of attempting to receive visits and/or letters from those in the outside world. The men in this study sought relationships while serving a sentence and in some instances, felt fulfilled by their efforts to maintain new relationships or re-establish significant prior relationships. In attempting to maintain a relationship with his daughters, one of the interviewees indicated, "I constantly sent Christmas cards, birthday cards and letters. I ended up drawing, pencil drawing things for them and constantly trying to stay in touch" (Joe). Another described his attempts to maintain a relationship with his children.

When I have money on my books and I can pay for phone time, then I go ahead and call them then. They all respond to me, but yet I know they are in their—I won't say they are in their own world but they have a lot of—let me put it like this, if they are like me, they are caught up into what they are doing, in which I understand. (Ralph)

While not having a meaningful relationship with his adoptive father during childhood, this interviewee shared how he felt somewhat surprised that his father was so supportive throughout his incarceration, describing that he and his father were able to establish a relationship only after his parents were divorced.

So I started talking to my dad more. At this time, my dad's the only one visiting me; he's answering my phone calls. He's keeping my books loaded with money. He was there. And that's when it kind of occurred to me like—and they had just got divorced like a year and a half before. (Andrew)

Yet another spoke of re-connecting with a former girlfriend who is also incarcerated.

Because another one of my exes is back in my life, she's in the pre-release, and me and her have been writing. We all have a favorite ex, well it's my favorite ex, and we've been writing back and forth. (Greg)

While some of the men felt successful in re-establishing or maintaining outside relationships during incarceration, others termed their efforts as unsuccessful. Though one respondent expressed doubt about establishing an intimate relationship during incarceration, he explained how he still wants to establish a relationship with a woman because he is lonely while serving his sentence. “It’s a huge rarity to find somebody that—it’s very hard. But I still seek it. I still seek the companionship of a woman a lot because I feel lonely” (Alex). This same participant later recollected a female visitor in which he had a romantic interest hiding her pregnancy during a visit, “I guess that’s the thing about being in prison, you can’t have those. I think relationships are unrealistic for some reason, especially when you go home and the pressure is so much they’re not successful at all.” Alex’s comments reveal an acceptance that he will remain lonely throughout the remainder of his life and that he has no control over his loneliness. Alex’s sense of loneliness emerged early on in his childhood as he very meaningfully explained his loneliness during childhood after the divorce of his parents. This feeling of loneliness prevailed into adulthood and yet his own actions of taking his girlfriend’s life deprived him of an intimate relationship. Perhaps in some ways her murder was a relief as inferred from his comment that the pressure of a relationship is too intense and destined to fail. Rather than experience failure and loss of relationship, it was less stressful to be alone.

While the majority of the men discussed actively seeking relationships during incarceration, some expressed their disappointment at the loss of relationships due to being incarcerated. “Before I came down, all my friends, even my work, ‘Oh, don’t worry about it, we’ll send you money, we’ll write you.’ I haven’t heard a thing from none of them” (Robert). During the course of the interview with this next participant, a large part of the discussion was centered on his mother’s suicide and the bitterness he holds against his father. In spite of the resentment, he seems motivated to reconnect with his father after his release and appears to be fearful that reconnecting with him before being released will appear manipulative.

I don’t speak to him still. He’s changed his life and I don’t want to try to do it through here. He’s healthy. He’s got plenty of years ahead of him and I don’t want – because with him I don’t want it to turn into, “Oh, it’s all prison talk and this and that.” I want it to be more personal. (Matt)

*Seeking religion/faith.* Several of the men interviewed offered their perceptions of faith and their experiences with believing in God or a god. Those that expressed an awareness of faith or religion during childhood shared how they felt harmed by religion and maintained that their search for help would not include religion or faith.

I was always taught—like my grandmother, we had to watch these bible videos before I went outside and played about this loving God and I felt like I was loving? If I was God I wouldn’t let some mother shoot themselves in front of their kid, or if I was God I wouldn’t let these people starve or kids get abused. Who’s this God? And a lot of my anger came because I’m your son? Watch what I can do. (Matt)

Another participant expressed his resentment with being made to attend his church four times a week and do what he referred to as “going out in service” to people’s homes as a child. “And in my opinion, they use the children as a way to get their foot in the door. Because people are less likely to slam the door on a child than an adult. Yes, I had to do that, yes, I already held resentment” (Richard). These statements illustrate how some of the men had developed a resentment of religion during childhood. Those that expressed childhood resentment did not

seek other forms of religion in adulthood or incarceration; however, others actively engaged in the process of seeking faith during incarceration. None of the men expressed seeking faith or religion in adulthood prior to incarceration.

Those men who sought faith and spirituality during incarceration believed they have benefitted and been assisted in becoming a better person through a connection with religion.

I was 40 years old and caught 11 and a half. I won't lie. I needed to search for peace, peace of mind, and spirituality. When my mom passed on was when my real search for spirituality began. (Greg)

When discussing his search for spirituality, he continued with

Something happened to me, like I said. I guess if I would've been a Christian and this happened, I would say I got saved. I'm not a Christian, although it's a cool thing, I mean Jesus was an awesome dude. (Greg)

Another participant explained how he believed the process of accepting Jesus Christ as his Savior has greatly benefitted him. Succinctly put, this interviewee summed up how he felt adhering to Christian principles has helped him overcome being untruthful, "Well, I said if I'm going to walk with Christ in my heart I can't keep lying" (Joe).

***Summary of seeking behaviors.*** This section illustrated the seeking behaviors reported by the participants. Seeking help was common and consisted of formal measures in childhood and adulthood. The formal measures of seeking help were reported as disappointing, offering no relief from the struggles of family and relationships. Seeking help through informal means, typically with someone known to them, was found to be predominant during adolescence. Such informal methods of seeking proved to be successful for some, and unsuccessful for others.

Seeking relationships was a predominant theme throughout all the interviews. In analyzing the narratives, seeking relationships appears to serve a need for meaningful connections. Many explained how their pre-incarceration relationships were not meaningful, or

how they destroyed relationships, particularly with intimate partners. While some attempts at re-establishing familial relationships were deemed successful during incarceration, others expressed how their attempts were not successful. Some of the men disclosed the loneliness of their incarceration. During incarceration, where life is routinized and largely predictable, the men may be less distracted than they were in society and have more opportunity to invest in meaningful relationships. Or perhaps, simply the opportunity for visits and letters from the outside offers relief from boredom and the “slow” time of incarceration.

The majority of the men shared their views on religion and faith. This section made known that while lacking a faith, questioning God, or resenting forced religion during childhood, many of the men expressed finding a form of religion or faith during incarceration that they believed helped them improve themselves. A few sought a relationship with Jesus as an object of intimacy, trust, and to better themselves. The others who discussed religion or faith did not express an adherence to another formal religion, but rather had created for themselves somewhat of a potpourri of religious ideologies for themselves to live by.

**Primary Dimension: Disengaging.** All of the inmates interviewed described behaviors that indicated a process of disengaging from the hurtful or stressful situations they found themselves in during childhood and adulthood. Such acts included physically removing themselves from a situation and mentally retreating. This coping strategy was most often shared as an adult mechanism to avoid conflict in a situation, or disengage with the use of alcohol and/or drugs. The conceptual categories that emerged within the primary dimension of disengaging are: being alone, using drugs/alcohol, quitting, cheating, and leaving. The conceptual categories of cheating and leaving are specific to adulthood.



*Being alone/leaving.* All the men interviewed explained how they would actively disengage from a situation. In childhood, such disengagement primarily consisted of running away or retreating to a place of solitude. “We had woods in the back of my grandma’s house and that’s where I spent most of my time alone” (Matt). Another described how he would remove himself and utilize the opportunity to retreat from his father and stepmother. “Really we had the house—we had a finished basement and I went down there so a lot of times I wouldn’t even talk to him (father). I’d just come in the house, down the stairs in my room. As little as possible, really” (Joe). Yet another interviewee who grew up in an urban area shared his method of disengaging, “Comic books, collecting comic books and reading fantasy novels and just entrenching yourself like in a fantasy. I guess that helped me cope with a lot of things, just to separate myself from everything” (Alex). Another explained how he thought about disengaging permanently during childhood and committing suicide just as his mother had. “Like I didn’t want to be here. Maybe I want to go join my mom” (Matt).

Being alone as a form of disengagement continued as a coping strategy within the context of adulthood for a majority of the men.

My girlfriend used to say all the time—because if I wasn’t at the bar drinking or at work, I was home in the bedroom watching TV, like withdrawn from everybody. Yeah. A hermit pretty much, is what she called me. Because I’d come out to eat, check on the kids once in a while and go back in the bedroom and watch TV. (Robert)

In meeting his girlfriend’s parents for the first time, a participant told the parents that their daughter was pregnant and soon the topic of abortion became part of the conversation. This participant’s reaction to the discussion of abortion led him to eliminate caring about her parents and disengage from the remainder of the conversation. “I can care less about her family now. I just started playing my x-box. After we ate, I went to my room” (Jason). Perhaps, abortion

represented yet another instance of parents taking away the potential for his relationship, in this case his imagined child.

Disengagement also took the form of physically leaving the situation rather than working to resolve it. In the next quote, notice how the perception of rejection quickly led to hurt and the disengagement.

we never had no physical altercations, but I would get mad and I would leave. I would never jump on her or nothing like that, I would just leave and be gone all day and all that and she would get mad. Other than paying the bills, I was helping her, but I felt like I was being disrespected and I was hurt so I left. (Ray)

While some of the men described being alone or leaving a situation while remaining in the relationship, others explained how they disengaged from the relationship completely. Their descriptions appeared to convey an inability to form attachments as one interviewee explained, “The only way I can say it is I get tired of a woman, I just leave, find me another one. That’s about how it was” (Dan). Another described similar behavior when leaving the relationship, “I just moved on and didn’t say anything” (Jason). The following interviewee was convicted of domestic violence and menacing by stalking against his intimate partner. Controverting the facts, he described a process of disengagement with, “Don’t fight for my relationship. I just give up” (Ed). At the other extreme, one individual described his sudden departure and full severing of connection with his family, not unlike the parental abandonment endured by many of these men in childhood.

I got five kids and two step kids. I was there for the first one’s birth, and as a dad I was in his life for probably the first three or four years, and that’s when I started doing drugs. Instead of bringing bad stuff to the relationship, I just got in my car and left one day and never came back. (Phil)

A plan to completely disengage after release from prison was offered by a participant. “I’m planning on falling off the face of the earth pretty much when I get out. I just want to be”

(Andrew). Andrew's sentiment of disengaging by falling of the face of the earth after his release appears to be a protective measure to avoid future rejection and loss.

Disengaging by removing themselves from a situation especially during conflict was storied throughout the interviews. Some of the men expressed how the act of disengaging was intentional. Other's discussion of disengaging appeared to be routine and normalized.

***Drugs and alcohol.*** All but one of the men described how their disengaging behaviors included the use of drugs and alcohol. One interviewee described the effect drugs had in escaping his feelings during his teenage years:

I started drinking, and now I'm an alcoholic. And then started doing X pills. I never did that before. I started feeling good about myself and I kept chasing that good feeling. It wasn't the high, it was—well it was the high but at the time it wasn't like—I was chasing a euphoric feeling. (Andrew)

In adulthood, one participant equivocally explained his use of alcohol as an avoidance mechanism by stating, "Maybe if I was battling issues, relationship trouble or feelings of any kind of inadequacy, maybe I'd get drunk" (Greg). These men shared their stories of alcohol and marijuana use beginning in their pre-teens. Some shared how their parent(s) were alcoholics and active substance abusers, while others noted their use of drugs and/or alcohol began when they started "hanging with the older crowd." All reported that drug and alcohol use served as a means to disengage from early family struggles and the emotions it evoked.

***Quitting.*** In discussing childhood experiences, a frequent way of disengaging or avoiding was to quit school during their teenage years. "I quit high school when I was 16. I just started hanging out" (Alex). Another simply stated, "I just said the heck with it" (Keith). It appears that the stress of attending school intensified the already stressful situation experienced at home. Although they felt powerlessness in changing their home life, quitting school seemed to be a quick fix to relieving one source of stress.

***Infidelity and cheating.*** Almost all of the participants discussed their unfaithfulness to their wives or cheating on their girlfriends throughout the relationship. One such interviewee described his repeated infidelities that caused conflict throughout the duration of the marriage. He expressed his inability to understand his behavior, his inability to resolve the marital conflict, and becoming “numb” in the relationship.

I don't know. I don't know if I just—I didn't know how to deal with it, I guess, I don't know. I don't know if it was . . . I know I was mad, I was hurt and it was almost to the point where I started getting numb. I guess I started getting numb with how much I cared about what went on. I think that's what happened with the situation when I kind of did—it wasn't really a retaliation, it happened, I didn't stop it, I let it go, and then I had to face the music when I got home. And the problem is I couldn't. (Joe)

One respondent convicted of murdering the mother of two of his children shared his matter-of-fact and apathetic sentiment about his infidelities, projecting his behaviors on the generalized other and depersonalizing self and others as merely “players” in the game of sexual conquests. “People are players, I guess. More notches on your belt, or whatever you want to call it. Yeah, something like that. Forbidden fruit and all of that stuff” (Phil).

***Summary of disengaging behaviors.*** This section illustrated the disengaging behaviors reported by the participants. Being alone was a behavior that the men reported engaging in during childhood and adulthood. The use of drugs and alcohol was also a mechanism in adulthood and childhood for disengaging as an attempt to feel good or avoid relationship conflict. Quitting school was the process for disengagement in childhood, whereas infidelity and cheating was primarily the disengagement mechanism for not knowing how to deal with relationship issues or conflict. Behaviors of disengagement displayed the ineffective coping mechanisms of the men interviewed.

**Primary Dimension: Controlling.** Controlling is one of the primary dimensions that emerged with all participants throughout the interviews. The concept of controlling in this

section refers to the participants' behaviors used to dominate or exercise direction over a situation both in childhood and adulthood. The conceptual categories that described their controlling behaviors are: Not having control, the need to control situations, and controlling intimate partner.

***Not having control.*** The concept of not having control for these men was often experienced in relation to childhood loss. They reported an intense experience of realizing that they were unable to control the abandonment, abuse, or treatment that greatly affected their life. One participant described how he lived with his grandmother after his mother's suicide. He shared how he believed he was doing well at his grandmother's until his father removed him. "One day my dad just decided that he was going to show up and just snatch us out of my grandma's home" (Matt). Another spoke of not having control over his home situation, which he described as abusive. "Until I got older, I was helpless. Because I was little, there was nothing I could do" (Robert). Still another spoke of being made to take medications when he did not want to, remembering, "All of a sudden, they're like, 'Oh yeah, you're not ADD.' I'm like, 'Well, you're just picking up on this five years into the fact?'" They changed my meds, I had no control over that, put me on Depakote" (Andrew). These quotes are painful reminders of the helplessness felt by these men to change the disruption and adversity in their childhood.

***Controlling situations.*** As children and teenagers, the men did attempt to regain some sense of control over their lives. One participant described how he would act out in school as he explained that being violent was the only control he had throughout childhood. "Then I got removed from my first school when I was in fourth grade. They were like we don't want this kid because I acted out. I hit teachers, things like that" (Matt). Explaining how rebellious behavior was his attempt to control, one explained, "I started drinking and getting in trouble at 14 as a way

to show my parents that I didn't give a shit what they said, I was going to do what I wanted"

(Richard). Yet another explanation came from a participant recollecting how he attempted to control how he dressed as a teenager.

All I want to say is I was working and I decided I wanted to buy me some teenager's clothes and it was tight fitting jeans stuff and my mom . . . yeah, and turtleneck shirts, and my mom got all upset about it. She said I had to take them back. I kept telling her no and then my stepfather he walks in and said, "If you can't take them back, you can leave." So I just went straight down to my bedroom, packed shit up and walked right out in to the world. (Dan)

Efforts to control situations and feel powerful prevailed in adulthood. One participant alluded to the culture of selling drugs and explained how "cooking meth" was a position of power and filled his yearning to have people around him who looked up to him. Nonetheless, his exulted position in the drug culture as the "meth cook" did not protect him from experiencing deep rejection, in discovering his girlfriend talking to another man.

When I found out she was still talking to this dude, I used that for an excuse. I think I started to—it came about part of the insecurity of wanting people to want me and to like me and stuff like that. In meth, women usually want to be the one sleeping with the cook and so I felt like I had bargaining power. (Matt)

This interviewee described how he used intimidation in an attempt to control the new boyfriend of his child's mother.

I meet the guy he's like—first I come in the door and he's standing across the room like this. My daughter's mom introduces me to him, and he's like, "Cheryl and your mom have told me a lot about you, please don't hurt me." I was like, "Well, you got to show me that there's a reason not to." (Andrew)

Interestingly, one of the men described how he did not have control over his situation as a child and did not want that to be his children's experience. He took parenting classes so he could be in control of his own parenting. "Mom would come home drunk and wake us up out of our sleep to do the dishes. I took parenting classes because I have a kid now and I don't do that" (Jason).

Although most of the stories describing controlling behavior were attempts to gain power over situations, Jason wanted to be in control of himself, thus the taking parenting classes to be a better parent.

***Controlling intimate partner.*** The strategies these men used to control the intimate partners are similar to those strategies well documented in the intimate partner violence literature (Bancroft, 2002; Wetzell & Ross 1983). Controlling behavior as “the push-pull type thing,” also referred to as “crazy-making” (Wetzell & Ross, 1983), is vividly portrayed in this next quote.

We've been living together these whole five years and pretty much since then and she had tried and brought guys to the house, I ran them off and then would flip on her like, ‘What the f@ck are you doing?’ ‘You’re out there sleeping around with these girls.’ I was like, ‘Yeah, but who's bed do I still crawl into at night?’ Me not seeing the problem there. I'm like, all right, well I've got her. She won't leave me, but now she's trying to. No, no, no, now you got to stay. You had your chance. The push pull type thing. (Andrew)

Verbal abuse against the intimate partner was disclosed with many of the men in the study. One such quote illustrates the participant’s growing resentment at his wife over the loss of material possessions.

So then we ended up getting back together. We were struggling and I started thinking about all the stuff I used to have; motorcycles, cars, all my guitars and I would just wake up and hate her. I spit on her one time, I guess that’s a form of physical abuse. But I would call her a stinking whore, stuff like that, belittled her really bad because I felt she deserved it. (Matt)

Attempts to control were also grounded in expectations of reciprocity, as described in this participant’s perspective on giving.

I bought her a car. That kind of put things on a different level for me because I felt like I’m doing all these things for you, but yet I’m not getting no attention or whatever, I feel like I should get. (Ray)

While many of the men described how they attempted control of their partner through physical and verbal abuse, six of the men interviewed were convicted of murder or attempted murder. For four of the six men, the act of attempting to take the life of the intimate partner

occurred when the victim was attempting to leave or had recently left the relationship. One of the participants took the life of his girlfriend, stating she had told his wife about the affair and he feared he would lose everything, including his family. The other participant convicted of murder killed his girlfriend because he was jealous. Not all the men described the act of attempting to take the life of their intimate partner, but rather vaguely indicated or completely denied responsibility for the murder or attempted murder. This degree of controlling behavior was typically explained in vague terms. One of the participants described the attempted murder of his intimate partner in this manner: “A friend of mine called me on my job and talked me off my job and an argument ensued and I wound up shooting that person” (Mike). Interestingly, this interviewee distanced himself from his victim by first describing his intimate partner as “a friend of mine,” while later further removing himself from any emotional connection he referred to her as “this individual.”

When this argument came, it came very rapidly, very heatedly from that other individual almost to where it’s like spitting in my face, I just lost it. So that when everything was ending with us and this argument came up, a lot of anger came out at that time. (Mike)

In an effort to completely divest himself of any responsibility for an attempted murder, this man merely acknowledged himself as an innocent observer to the violent stabbing of his wife explaining, “But as far as it comes down to—even if I could have proven that I didn’t actually stab her, she still got stabbed and it was because I was there and I shouldn’t have been in that house” (Keith).

Yet another interviewee described attempting to control the situation in which his girlfriend was calling his house and hanging up on his wife thus potentially threatening the loss of his marital relationship, children and home: “She said I put it through her head and threatened



to kill her and all that stuff, but I didn't. I just said you need to stop because if I lose everything I'm not going alone" (Joe).

***Summary of controlling behavior.*** This section described the behaviors of the interviewees used to control situations that might result in loss. The men frequently found themselves to have no control over the disruptions of their childhood; however, during the teenage years they described a number of strategies to gain to control and feel more instrumental in their lives and relationships. As teenagers such behaviors included rebelling, using drugs and alcohol, and being violent. In adulthood their target was their intimate partner; verbal and physical assaults, manipulation, murder and attempted murder were all behaviors utilized in an attempt to control her perceived rejection or abandonment. While the capacity to physically control an intimate partner is challenging while incarcerated, inmates prove to be quite adept at using strategies to control relationships while serving a sentence. Such controlling behaviors might include: an inordinate amount of phone calls to the intimate partner, pressure to send money or "boxes" that include clothing and food items, questioning the intimate partner in letters and during phone calls, and having friends or family monitor the intimate partner's actions. Surprisingly, none of the men in this study disclosed such actions. Perhaps these men had let go of the need to control those relationships on the outside, or perhaps there was a reluctance to disclose such methods because they may be reported and forced to desist, or there was no longer an intimate partner in their lives.

**Primary Dimension: Blaming.** The primary dimension of blaming was present throughout all the interviews. The action of blaming refers to placing responsibility on another or holding another accountable for one's own actions. Blaming of parents for their own behaviors prevailed throughout childhood and adulthood. Blaming the intimate partner or the crime victim

for conflict in the relationship and violent actions was common. The characteristics of blaming behaviors in this study are described within the conceptual categories of blaming parents, intimate partner and/or victim of crime, and blaming society.

***Blaming parents.*** The men interviewed largely blamed the custodial parent for the loss of the other parent. In discussing his mother's suicide, one interviewee explained how he blamed his father. "Yeah. So I resented my dad for that. I blamed him. People used to make fun of me for it because in the 80s it wasn't as common for people to be single parents" (Matt). Another blamed his mother for the loss of his stepfather. Although this participant earlier described the abuse he witnessed during childhood, he still blamed his mother for the loss. "My mother was very promiscuous, my stepfather was . . . She was a waitress and she'd go home with a different guy every night" (Keith).

While the men interviewed engaged in blaming parents during childhood, in adulthood much of the blame shifted to the parents of his intimate partner. An interviewee described blaming his mother-in-law for being on his wife's side during conflict. "If me and her (intimate partner) started arguing, her mom would get involved and of course she would be on her side and" (Matt). Another shared how he blamed his mother-in-law for forcing him to marry her daughter because of pregnancy, describing, "And her mother knew all along it wasn't my child. Her mother was a big influence the whole time" (Keith). While the two descriptions above describe situations in which the partner's parents were assigned blame, another participant blamed his wife's parents for the way she was raised in being allowed to quit school, attributing much of the marital conflict due to the result of her upbringing. He explains, "Well, it's just the way she grew up I guess. She didn't feel—again, she didn't know discipline in her house and I think she just was let loose to do whatever" (Joe). It is evident that parents, whether their own or

others, were the object of blame for failures and conflict in relationships in both childhood and adulthood.

**Blaming partner/victim.** The participants engaged in blaming their intimate partner for problems in the relationship and with their children, particularly during their incarceration. A participant explained how his ex-wife was at fault for his daughter's current issues, indicating he could help the daughter if he was not incarcerated.

But my youngest one she's had like health issues, panic attacks and it's like I know I could help her if I was there because I think it's just a security thing. She don't find much security in mom because mom falls apart very easily. (Joe)

Another man showed insight into the illogic of blaming his girlfriend for cheating on him because his ex-wife had been unfaithful. "I talked to myself a lot in the back of my head, and sometimes I would have myself believing and thinking things that were totally irrational and not true." When asked for an example, this interviewee explained:

Like she's out cheating on me. She's an hour late getting home she was out messing around with somebody else, and knowing that wasn't what happened. Rationally knowing that, but my head wouldn't let me think that. Because my ex-wife did run around and cheat on me. And with my girl now, she a lot of times would tell me, "Well I'm not her. You can't blame me for stuff she did," but I would. I couldn't help it. (Robert)

**Blaming society.** A number of the men appeared to blame society, the media, or the judicial system for their current situation and felt victimized by society. The following statements made by participants highlight the sentiments of blame. This respondent blamed court personnel for his current incarceration, stating the only reason he was convicted of arson was due to a prior arson conviction. "And I think that's because maybe at the time if the prosecutor, my lawyer and the judge were there where I could punch them in their face, I might have" (Greg). In describing his blame of the media, the interviewee explains how the media influences free will.

But although everyone tells us we have free choice, I know also that in television and other means of the media that we're some ways guided towards doing certain things or believe in certain things that may not necessarily be in our best interest. (Mike)

This interviewee shared how he was put in jail because his girlfriend's family works in the criminal justice system. "She had an advantage because her aunt they all worked for the police dispatch and all this so she would put me in jail" (Matt). Throughout the interview, the following respondent described how society is corrupt and unfair, blaming society for his life course and referring to society and corrupt individuals as "a machine."

Well, yeah. You know what I mean? Just the way I've been my whole life. I'm sure there's other people like that as well. They've been caught up in this—I don't know what you want to call it—machine. All it knows how to do is eat. I always try to do the right thing, even back when I was a kid. But in the context of my marriage I just don't know how I got to the point that it got, I really don't. (Keith)

Lastly, this respondent blamed the court for falsely convicting him of murdering the mother of his children.

Yeah, I'm here for taking the life of a lady that I was with for about 19 years. They said it but, there was no evidence. It was all hearsay. There is no way I could have did it because it was inside of a van and the way that it happened, I didn't have a drop of blood on me, and I don't see how I got convicted. (Phil)

***Summary of blaming.*** This section illuminated the blame interviewees assigned to different people and entities in their lives. Blaming in childhood consisted primarily of blaming the custodial parent for the loss of the other parent. In adulthood, blame was often assigned to the intimate partner's parents for intervening or controlling in the relationship or for not providing sufficient discipline during the intimate partner's childhood and thus causing the daughter to be a poor marital partner. Interviewees also blamed their intimate partner for an array of issues that included infidelity, lack of appreciation for him and the children's psychological difficulties. Finally, these men faulted the "system," the media, and the "machine" of society for their conviction and incarceration.

**Primary Dimension: Overcoming.** Throughout the interviews, participants described their attempts at overcoming loss. Overcoming refers to the actions taken in an attempt to prevail over a difficult situation. This section will highlight how such attempts were largely ineffective and self-destructive during childhood and continued throughout adulthood. The conceptual categories that emerged within the primary dimension of overcoming were as follows: rage, social status, being good to others, and perception of self.

**Rage.** Rage was used as a mechanism to overcome loss during childhood and adulthood with all of the men interviewed. One participant shared that the only recourse to him when dealing with the loss of his mother was to express his rage. Describing himself at 11 years old, the participant exclaimed, “They knew that I was angry. I learned how to be violent and be good at it” (Matt). In adulthood, the immediate rage a participant experienced when finding out his girlfriend revealed their affair to his wife was described poignantly in this excerpt, “It’s like I don’t know, I really don’t. It was almost like an out of body experience after that because I was just so—I mean it’s like you got busted, you’re raged” (Joe). This participant continued to describe how his emotion escalated when his girlfriend laughed at him, immediately exploding in rage.

And I see cop cars already coming because somebody’s called and he’s yelling something but again it’s like I’m out of body. And when I let her go, she looked up and started laughing and I just went poof—that’s when I lost it. I didn’t even look, I just started pulling the trigger, walking away. (Joe)

Being overcome with anger was frequently used to describe the moment of using a weapon. “When this argument came, it came very rapidly, very heatedly from that other individual almost to where it’s like spitting in my face, I just lost it” (Mike). Note how he distances himself from the relationship by referring to his partner as “that other individual.” Others described their efforts to struggle and contain ferocity of their emotion, “Because I still get angry, I still hear

somebody's mouthing, the things they say, and picture splitting their head open" (Greg). He continued to explain how he overcomes his rage and his sense of pride in his achievement.

So for me to have anger or animosity towards anyone now would be like being mad at somebody for having cancer. It's some struggle they're going through and I've overcome—I feel very optimistic. (Greg)

As Greg described still struggling with rage, he contrasts that with explaining how he has overcome the rage he experiences during incarceration. While he does have opportunity to express rage during incarceration, it should be noted that Greg is serving his sentence in a high security correctional institution and has limited access to those he hears "mouthing" when he pictures splitting their head open.

***Social status.*** The participants spoke of their social status in childhood and adulthood, citing times when they felt they had no social status and times when they believed they had achieved social status among their peers. Several discussed how they never had a parent at any of the school functions and the impact it had on them during childhood. "I was always the one that like stuff like at school I never had a parent there. I was always the outcast" (Matt). Another described losing his hair shortly after high school and the impact going bald had on his confidence and perceived status among his peers.

Oh yeah. Now you have it, now you don't. That was like what the hell is going on? What's happening? Yeah, that was a big deal. It's like your confidence just went low. I mean, your looks. You kind of do okay in high school, you're an athlete and all of a sudden your look starts going and, I don't know, I guess it was a big deal. (Joe)

Making bad choices in an effort to achieve status was a common pattern as described in this excerpt, "Yeah, it was just the bad choices I made. Trying to be with the in-crowd. I was nickel slick. Other than that, selling dope and weed and playing with the women. Get cars and dress nice" (Phil). This same participant also described how he used violence to obtain social status by stating, "Like I'm the man. I told you don't f@ck with me, shit like that. Yeah, I was a fighter all

my life” (Phil). As a number of the men discussed the social status achieved by selling illegal drugs, one participant clarified, “I like how you make the money. I like the toys you can buy. I like the life you can be living with them and that’s what got me in the street” (Ed). Yet another exclaimed how he maintains social status within the correctional institution by getting along with everyone.

Everyone in here likes me. Young, saggy-pants gang-bangers, CO’s—prick CO’s—just leave me alone, don’t bother me. They’ll smell smoke coming from my cell and not say nothing—which I try to avoid. (Greg)

Describing the perception of their social status, the men recalled how they believed not having a parent at school or standing out by being different in appearance adversely affected their social status. Others described how clothes, money, and toughness elevated their sense of status in spite of the criminal activities that supported this lifestyle.

***Being good to others.*** A common theme throughout the interviews was stories that reflected the men’s “goodness” by giving to other or being nice to others. Several of these stories were memories of childhood experiences. One participant described how he would attempt to be good to his birth mother on the rare occasions he would see her.

And then the next day I’m getting picked up and taken to Cedar Point with my sister, and I know it’s not because she wants to. So I’d be the only good one on the trip. My little brother, they’re being bad as hell. And I’d be the one that gets in trouble for it. Onetime we went to Geauga Lake, and it started hailing. And my little brother Ryan, he was the youngest, he was freaking out. Little chunks of ice were hitting him. I took my shirt off and held it over his head and back as we ran to the car and I got in trouble for taking my shirt off. Everything was my fault. And I still went out of my way to try to please you. (Andrew)

Andrew also described his attempt as a child to be seen as a generous person by giving a pen to a homeless man.

My mom (adoptive) used to work at this church as a secretary. And at the front of the church there was always homeless people just hanging out on the steps, while my mom was showing me this neat cool pen she got. It was brand new, her boss got it for her. It

cost like \$50. And I'm like wow, a 50 dollar pen. I found the piece of shit so I stole it from my mom. But I'm a good guy because I gave it to a homeless guy upfront. "I got no food for you but I got a nice pen. My mom said it was bought for \$50. You can have it." Conflict. (Andrew)

Attempts at being good to others and thus being perceived as a good person extended beyond childhood. One such example is explained in this description of paying for a woman's citizenship during incarceration.

Yeah, she lives out of town, and she would come visit me. She has two daughters and we hooked up and we were for like two years. We were going strong and she would come visit me. She's not a citizen, she's Dominican and I paid for her citizenship. I had two chains, I sold one of my other chains and I paid for her citizenship which is like \$700 and then shortly after that she just up and left. (Alex)

The men's attempts at being good to others began in childhood. Andrew's attempts at being good to his birth mother and a homeless man appear to be an effort to be accepted, particularly with his birth mother. Men in the study did not specifically express adulthood attempts to be good to others prior to incarceration. Perhaps strong memories of adult struggles and violence superseded any recognition of a positive self-image.

***Perception of self.*** Throughout the series of interviews, the men vacillated in recounting a negative perception of self and a positive perception of self. They each systematically recounted how they had or have a negative perception of self and would then describe themselves in a positive manner. One participant described his childhood with, "I never really got accepted in any group except for the freaks. They accepted anybody, they didn't care." At another point in the interview he states, "So yeah, I probably didn't have the best of childhoods or anything but nothing that I feel like had any major impact. I still think I came out pretty good actually" (Keith). A man explained how he transferred his job to a different state, looking for a fresh start in his marriage. "So then when we moved, I'd say it's a fresh start. I'm trying to get a fresh start. I'm trying to do the right thing. Even though I'm probably not capable of doing it, I



really wanted to do the right thing. Then you're constantly reminded that oh, you're the adulterer, you cheated, you're broke." When asked how he felt about himself today, this participant stated:

I actually feel pretty good. I mean, physically wise, I mean when I see the doctors because I had a cholesterol issue but that's hereditary, but now I'm only on a little baby aspirin, that's all. But my vitals are like I'm a freaking kid. I feel like I'm in good shape for my age and mentally I think – physically I'm fine, emotionally there's still some struggles but I think if I got the shot to get out I think I can make a damn good husband this time. (Joe)

Succinctly describing how he would attempt to overcome feeling bad about himself by insulting his wife, one described, "You feel bad about yourself, it makes you feel good, or you trick yourself that it will make you feel good to say something to pull someone else down."

Later in the interview, he presented another perception of himself.

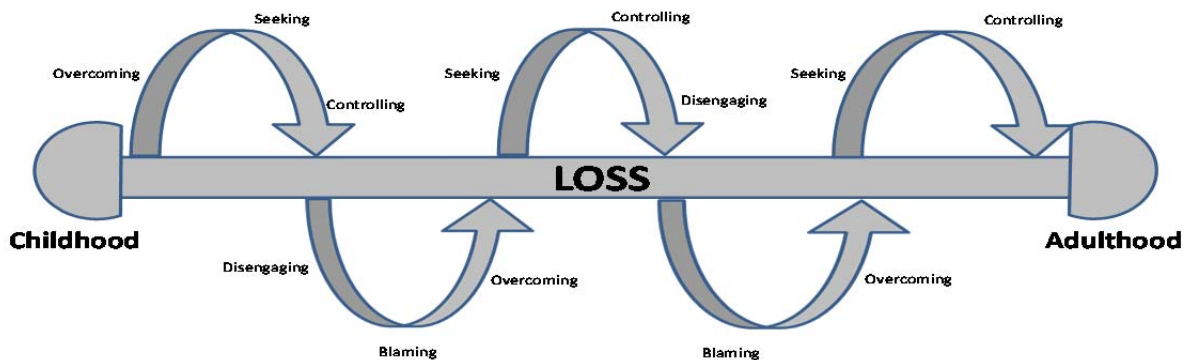
"I'm happy to say I feel like I am now, I mean I would introduce myself, "Hey, I'm a good guy," type thing. I've got a lot of work to do, but I'm finally happy with who I am. I'm really accepting of—not to get too hippie-guru-Buddhist stuff, but I don't know if everything happens for a reason. (Greg)

Many of the participants shared the contrasting perceptions of self throughout each interview suggesting the fluidity of their identities.

***Summary of overcoming.*** This section described the primary dimension of overcoming and measures taken to overcome real or perceived losses throughout their lives. Rage was expressed verbally and physically, at times with a weapon, as an attempt to overcome an immediate loss. Rage and violence were used to obtain and maintain social status among peers while attempts at being good to others often served as a measure of psychological self-protection to overcome negative perceptions of self.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the incarcerated men interviewed all experienced a loss in childhood. Such losses impacted their social processes in childhood and continued into adulthood. The processes the men described throughout the interviews encompassed a non-linear cycle of the primary dimensions. Figure 4.1 illustrates the relationship qualities among the core dimension of loss and the primary dimensions. Loss, continuous from childhood to adulthood, is represented as the most explanatory in understanding the lived experiences of participants. The primary dimensions of: seeking, controlling, overcoming, blaming, and disengaging are scattered throughout the loss timeline, indicating non-linear yet cyclical processes of the primary dimensions.



*Figure 4.1.* Relational qualities among core and primary dimensions.

A theoretical matrix will be introduced in chapter five to describe the centrality of loss and the interplay of seeking, disengaging, controlling, blaming, and overcoming. The theoretical matrix will be the impetus for suggesting theoretical propositions that emerge from the findings of this grounded theory study. These propositions will be discussed from the perspective of the prominent theories of IPV and the significance of the nascent theoretical findings of this study.

## Discussion and Implications

The goal of this study was to explore the etiology of intimate partner violence from the perspective of incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence. I sought to examine how incarcerated men explain how they became violent with their intimate partner(s). A grounded theory analysis revealed that one of the shared lived experiences for all of the men in the study was a significant loss that first occurred in childhood and appeared to have shaped the way they view and interact with their internal and external worlds through their lifespan.

Many studies have been conducted involving the general population of incarcerated men however; an overwhelming majority of such studies focus on general reentry efforts and factors that impact recidivism. As evident from the review of literature, studies on partner violent men have been primarily focused on personality characteristics and mental health in an effort to understand the underlying causality of their violence (Chiffrieller et al., 2006; Gondolf, 1988; Hamberger & Hastings, 1986). The majority of these studies have sampled community and/or probation populations of abusive men, making this study unique in its purposeful sample of incarcerated men who were convicted of offenses involving intimate partner violence. This study joins a small number of studies that have used qualitative methods to study men who have been abusive and violent with their intimate partners and yet is distinctive in the exploration of men's understanding of how they became abusive to intimate partners, in contrast to earlier qualitative inquiries that have focused on men's self-deception (Smith, 2007) and episodic descriptions of violent acts (Dempsey & Day, 2011; Fenton & Rathus, 2011).

The process of interviewing and the subsequent analysis of the interview data with this population of incarcerated men sought a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the participants' lived experience as they perceived and made meaning of life events that led to their

violence. The interview was not a truth-finding endeavor, nor an attempt to determine what factually happened in the relationship that led to the commission of crime. Any emphasis on truth or not truth from an objective perspective only polarizes the offered narratives into “right or wrong,” good or bad, and consequently limits the discovery of the more complex narrative that explores the interviewees’ subjective construction of the social processes, events, and conditions that lead to problematic behavior (Agnew, 2006; Presser, 2010).

The interviews revealed that the men experienced a loss of a parent in childhood that significantly impacted contemporary and future relationships. Such losses occurred because of divorce, a parental estrangement, suicide, or abandonment. To ameliorate the emotional impact of loss they developed largely maladaptive patterns of behavior in childhood that continued to be practiced in their adult intimate relationships. The issue of childhood loss does not differentiate incarcerated men from many others in society who have experienced similar or more traumatic losses; however the impact of the loss for this sample of men remained emotionally unresolved in spite of efforts to overcome the experience by having nurturing or enhancing relationships. The lack of resolution for childhood loss appeared to contribute to the magnitude of emotional injury experienced by these men when they anticipated the loss of an intimate partner in adulthood. Intimate relationships, such as those with parents and intimate partners, are “*the paramount*” (Wood & Forest, 2011, p. 259) realm in shaping thoughts and feelings about self. The findings of this study corroborate the critical effect early loss had on partner violent men’s identity and their interactions with the social world.

Chapter five will interpret the findings presented in the fourth chapter and illustrate a theoretical matrix that will explain the conceptual relationship of the core dimension and the primary dimensions. From the conceptual model, theoretical propositions related to the findings

of this study and the extant literature of intimate partner violence (IPV) will be proposed. Lastly, implications for leadership practice, suggestions for future research, and the limitations of the study will be examined.

### **The Theoretical Matrix**

The findings of this study were organized into a core dimension and five primary dimensions. Dimensional analysis “brings the substance of analysis to the forefront of thinking as a structure for analysis” (Schatzman, 1991, p. 313). Dimensional analysis offers a method to understand the relationships among and between identified concepts and provides a method to understand human behaviors and how they interact with the external world. Included in the dimensional analysis are the considerations of context, conditions, social processes, and the impact of behaviors within a phenomenon. Following the analysis is a theoretical understanding of the data under study. The theoretical matrix is the instrument utilized to visually represent the theoretical grounding and describes the significant social processes of incarcerated men with a history of IPV.

The elements of the matrix are described by Kools et al. (1996) as “the *conditions* of a phenomenon “have an impact on actions and interactions” (p. 318). Conditions are the “dimensions of a phenomenon that facilitate, block, or in some other way shape” (p. 318) interactions. The conditions shape *processes* that “include intended or unintended interactions that are impelled by specific conditions” (p. 318). Processes create *consequences* that “are the outcomes of these actions or interactions” (p. 318). The conditions, processes, and consequences are represented in Figure 5.1 to provide a visual representation of the actions and interactions or the primary social processes specific to the findings of this study. The contexts of childhood,

adulthood, and incarceration are illustrated in Figure 5.1 in text alongside the indicated social processes.



*Figure 5.1.* The conditions, processes, and consequences of the theoretical matrix. Adapted with permission from Presentermedia.com.

**Core dimension.** The construct that emerged as the most explanatory in the phenomenon under study was the concept of loss. The analysis revealed how loss, a condition, provided the most explanatory power and was central to the five primary dimensions of blaming, controlling, seeking, overcoming, and disengaging. Note in Figure 5.1 the actions of the primary dimensions interface and are influenced by the experience of loss.

**The condition of loss.** The men described their emotional and social reactions to the childhood loss. The loss experiences described by the incarcerated men during their childhood were confined to the loss of a parent and did not extend to other losses, such as moving to a new geographic area or school, or experiencing the loss of belongings. While the majority of the men encountered an immediate loss of a parent due to divorce, the breakup of unmarried parents or suicide, others described what can be considered as a pattern of loss. This patterned loss was described by the men who either never or sporadically had the absent parent in their lives. For those men having both parents during childhood, those men described the absence of a meaningful, interactive relationship with one or both parents.

In describing the immediate loss of a parent in childhood, many of the incarcerated men shared that their reaction was that of shock, depression, and confusion. In the aftermath of the immediate loss of a parent, they described how the custodial parent, as a result of the divorce or breakup, worked longer hours, or seemed to become involved in another intimate relationship immediately. One interviewee described the experience as “She worked more, she was more stressed. She would come home agitated.” While the men did not put a meaning or phrase to the resulting situation with the custodial parent, descriptions of the aftermath of the familial disruption could be referred to as a secondary loss. It is known that some children are not impacted as severely as others by changes in family structure that include divorce of parents; however for other children such events can have a significant impact and result in pervasive adjustment problems continuing from childhood through adolescence (Wolchik, Tein, Sandler, & Doyle, 2002). The men interviewed in this study would most certainly fall into the latter group.

Such long-lasting effects are mediated by the care and responsibility of the parents. (Wolchik et al., 2002). It was prevalent throughout the interviews that the men experienced loss

with both the absent and custodial parent. As indicated in the next quote, the divorce of the parents was not mediated by spending time with the father. “But whenever we were with him we weren’t really with him. He’d pick us up, we go to his place and he’d go sit down watch TV” (Keith). With the introduction of a step-parent, some of the men more fully described the ongoing nature of the loss with the custodial parent.

Through high school, I played football, baseball, basketball. So first like seventh and eighth grade he was involved, he was watching all baseball and stuff and then high school. And then the more my stepmother and I battled, the more I guess she told him or whatever, I don’t know, but he stopped coming. He just stopped showing up. I mean, it was tough. (Joe)

The loss of a parent was not confined to mothers or fathers, but rather included either parent. The narratives are vivid testimony to the emotional injury of the initial loss experiences and its sequelae through adulthood, and their coping mechanisms mirrored those who reported never having the other parent or a pattern of absent parenting in childhood. Many of the men verbally reconciled the situation in the interviews with the explanation that an unknown parent did not want to be in their life. Regarding a patterned loss, this term was assigned to those who only had sporadic contact with an absent parent. For those who had more intermittent contact with an absent parent, their explanations of the relationship were somewhat more diverse. Some explained they did not know what they did to not have the absent parent in their life, while some appeared to minimize the absence of his father as he explained, “I could see my dad whenever I wanted.” It is noted that this individual’s father lived many states away from where he was raised. It may be assumed that those incarcerated men that grew up without one of the biological parents would somehow not know or experience the loss with the same impact as those whom experienced the immediate loss of a parent; however, the stories from men who had a parent but



who was not present in their life appeared as emotionally disruptive over the long term as those experiencing an immediate loss.

The loss experience of childhood had implications for adulthood, specifically adult intimate relationships. Relationship dissatisfaction was commonly expressed by the incarcerated men. Such relationship dissatisfaction did not always result in the immediate dissolution of the relationship. Rather, the relationship often continued in the face of hostility, abuse, infidelity, and resentment that predominated. In spite of the role that these men played in the deterioration of the relationship, they lamented the loss of a meaningful and caring relationship. Further, the men only experienced the sense of loss when the intimate partner terminated the relationship and not when they ended it. Thus, the recapitulation of the initial childhood trauma of being abandoned.

The subsequent explanation of the theoretical matrix rests on loss, characterized by loss of a parent in childhood and an intimate partner(s) in adulthood, as a core dimension that constitutes the condition which triggers and maintains social processes represented by the primary dimensions of seeking, overcoming, disengaging, blaming, and controlling (see Figure 5.1)

Of the five primary dimensions, seeking and overcoming were adaptive processes that were engaged to assuage loss. Blaming and disengaging are illustrative of maladaptive processes while controlling was an attempt to control the environment. I chose the social processes to be represented by the gears in the theoretical matrix (Figure 5.1) as an illustration of the movement of the social processes. The responses to loss found in this study were cyclical and non-linear, meaning that each of the processes were interconnected and energized by each other. To illustrate the complexities and the interactions of the five primary dimensions, I have utilized one

man's life narrative (Joe) from childhood through incarceration to use as a descriptive interpretation of interconnectedness of the social processes. Some of the details of Joe's story will be omitted in order to protect his identity but will not distort the essential elements of the interpretation. Quotes from other men in the study will also be shown to support the interpretation of the findings and to provide a deeper understanding of the behaviors engaged by the men.

**Adaptive processes of seeking and overcoming.** Reactions to early childhood loss involved seeking relationships with male peers and father figures. Joe's mother left the family when he was nine years old. He shared this discovery with "We woke up. We had some letters on the table." This discovery was learned through a note left by the mother. At such an early age, Joe expressed that he did not understand the family situation or why his mother unexpectedly left the family. While many of the other men in the study shared seeking relationships with older peers and father figures that were unstable and disappointing, Joe's situation was somewhat different in that he excelled at sports. Seeking a support system to overcome the loss of his mother consisted of his teammates and coaches.

Joe's participation in sports was an outlet for him and a mechanism to overcome the loss of his mother. He explained how, early on, his father would come to his games and was a support for him. Upon his father marrying another woman, Joe's support from his father deteriorated. He described his stepmother with flat affect, stating "She wasn't really nice," and recounted the continuation of a deleterious relationship with her.

I shared Joe's quote in the fourth chapter indicating that he would ask others outside of the family for advice in dealing with the familial struggles with his father and stepmother. This action is illustrative of how seeking and overcoming overlap with one process activating another.

Joe sought a meaningful relationship outside of the family as an attempt to belong while searching for knowledge and understanding of his current dilemma. Believing the downward spiral of the relationship with his father was influenced by his stepmother, Joe's interview continued on to illustrate his blame for the failing relationship on his father. "The problem is my dad never stepped in, he never intervened, he never took me to the side or anything like that."

To provide further evidence of this interpretation, I reference Keith's explanation of his relationship with his former stepfather in adolescence. Keith attempted to establish a bond with his former stepfather by seeking a relationship with him while at the same time, questioning the stepfather about the abuses he witnessed earlier in his childhood. Keith's intentions were to understand why the abuse occurred so he could overcome the confusion of abuse. Joe and Keith's narratives illustrate the interconnectedness of seeking and overcoming as adaptive mechanisms to overcome childhood loss. As can be seen in Joe's quote about his father never intervening, maladaptive processes of blaming and disengaging were also intertwined with adaptive processes.

**Maladaptive processes of blaming and disengaging.** Prevalent in all the interviews was the presence of blaming behavior. Blame is the result of the refusal to take personal responsibility and produces disrespect that is aimed at the one being blamed (Cohen, 2012). In response to the loss of a parent in childhood, blame was directed to the parents. Blame inhibits constructive conflict resolution (Cohen, 2012), therefore, the result of blaming parents creates conflict in the parent-child relationship. Blame continued to be placed on the parents for a resulting lack of relationship with the custodial parent and for the introduction of a stepparent in to the family structure.

Joe's story is illustrative of the blame placed on his father and stepmother. Joe attributed his family conflict as originating with the stepmother, but he never spoke of blaming his mother for leaving. It is only much later in the interview that he reported seeing his mother when he was an adult, asking her why she left, and making sense of the situation in retrospect. This is not to say that Joe should have blamed his mother instead of the stepmother, but rather that the blame attributed to the father and stepmother is likely to have contributed to the ongoing conflict.

The interviews revealed how blame would then result in disengaging from those around them. Drugs and alcohol were frequently used to disengage from the relationship or situation. As children and adults the men sought ways to be alone to avoid conflict by most frequently running away from home. In continuing Joe's narrative, the maladaptive process of disengaging began in childhood and continued into adolescence and took the form of creating space between his parents and him to avoid conflict at home. This is evidenced by him sharing that he intentionally moved his bedroom to a remote area of his home. In doing this, he explained how he would come home and go to his bedroom, successfully eluding any interactions with his father and stepmother.

Another form of active disengagement began during the summers when he was able to work for his friend's family at a vacation area. His discussion of being employed included him needing money to buy his own things; however, it was not focused on the accumulation of money or material possessions, but rather emphasized the relationships he was able to establish and the sense of belonging he experienced with those outside of his immediate family. He described his family life with "It just seemed like I was out on an island." Joe's story reveals the intersection of adaptive and maladaptive behaviors and the early onset of blaming and

disengaging behaviors. While blaming the parents and disengaging from family communication, Joe sought and found meaningful relationships with others.

As Joe continued through high school, his seeking behaviors became more focused on a girlfriend and her family. He declared “She had great parents” as he told of the positive relationship he was able to establish with them. While establishing the meaningful relationship with her family, his disengagement with his own family continued as a protective measure to avoid his own parents, whom he referred to as uncaring.

**Controlling.** The men reported not having control of situations in childhood. Such lack of control included not having control of what parent they lived with and not having control over the introduction of a stepparent. With Joe, the inability to control his environment included the introduction of a stepmother and the subsequent and continued negative relationship with her and his father. Joe found something that he could control and that was proximity. He was successful at placing distance between himself and the adverse relationships at home while he was able to pursue closer proximity with others throughout the remainder of his adolescence. Proximity management was not unique to Joe: The other men in the study all shared common memories and sentiments that included controlling how remote they chose to be from their families. For the men in this study, controlling the environment appears to be a learned behavior, stemming from the significant loss that resulted in not having control during childhood.

In concluding Joe’s journey from the loss of his mother as a child to him stepping in to adulthood, he describes his final control as an adolescent in making the decision to attend college several states away from his father and stepmother after graduating from high school. Joe described what appeared to be the conclusion of the relationship with his father. “Pretty much that was it. The only time I had contact with my dad is when he brought a TV down, dropped it

off and turned around and left. About a ten minute visit. And pretty much from then on I was on my own.”

**Transitions to adulthood.** Joe’s transition to adulthood left him feeling abandoned, yet his story does not end with him being alone in a new city with a TV. Joe’s perception of being abandoned by his father activates the cyclical interplay of the adaptive and maladaptive processes utilized in childhood. Joe’s story continues in his descriptions of attempting to overcome being alone by seeking relationships. As a young man, he sought intimate relationships with women. He described it as “You do what guys do. Be jerks,” meaning he was seeking relationships with multiple women. This resulted in Joe lacking any meaningful or intimate relationships.

Joe termed himself as having low self-esteem and told of getting married almost immediately out of college. He described his wife as having low-self-esteem and, once again seeing the repetition of childhood processes, blamed his wife and her parents for having no discipline during her childhood. The marriage was described as “having no foundation” and within a short period of time, he described the onset of marital conflict.

With the onset of marital conflict, blaming ensued. Joe blamed his wife for not having discipline, not having a career or skill to fall back on, and blamed her for extensive arguments that never achieved resolution. Coinciding with blaming was the return of disengagement. For Joe, disengagement took the form of working longer hours and having multiple one-night stands.

It has been found that engaging in extradyadic sex (Beaulieu-Pelletier, Philippe, Lecours, & Couture, 2011) is prevalent among those men with high attachment avoidance and serves not to seek intimate relationships with another, but rather to reduce their discomfort with intimacy

and to place a barrier between self and the intimate partner. The findings of Beaulieu et al. lend insight to understanding Joe's infidelities as a method of reducing the conflict with his wife.

Joe relocated his family multiple times, explaining the new location would provide a "clean slate" but his infidelities and marital conflict followed. Through Joe's discussion of his marital struggles, he describes "being numb." With Joe's wife finding out about one of his infidelities, he then blames his wife for "never getting past it." In addition to reducing his discomfort with intimacy, Joe relieved himself of any responsibility for contributing to the downward spiral of the relationship.

In adulthood, Joe and the other men in the study continued to the search for intimacy. And although they reported numerous partners or long-term marriages the relationships were unstable and chaotic. Nonetheless, several declared their relationships were stable because of the length of the marriage or length of the relationship regardless of their descriptions of multiple temporary separations, infidelities, multiple stays in jails, and an overall feeling of relationship dissatisfaction.

Joe's story, up to this point, is absent of any admitted violence against his wife. Joe did not see his affairs and one-night stands as emotionally abusive to his wife. One of Joe's infidelities turned in to a long-term affair with a woman much younger than he. In Joe's discussion of the extra-marital relationship he shared that he told the girlfriend "If I go down I'm not going alone," indicating that should he lose his wife and family over the affair, there would be consequences for her. It is at this point we see expressed threats, not to the wife, but to the girlfriend. His fear of loss and abandonment led to his attempt to control the girlfriend through implied threats of violence.

We can see the impact that fear of loss of the marriage had on Joe in his threats to the girlfriend. Within moments of the girlfriend revealing the affair to his wife, Joe murdered the girlfriend. Throughout the interview, which occurred many years after the crime, he continued the blaming process, and stated, “She played a deadly game” and referenced the “deadly game” multiple times.

Disengagement from the victim was present during the interview with Joe refusing to say the name of the victim. Several minutes of the interview with Joe were spent determining what name he would make up for her to avoid using her actual name during the interview. The ending of relationships or fear of losing the relationship in Joe’s situation triggered feelings of rejection and abandonment that resulted in acts of abuse and violence. Although many of the men denied committing any abuses in the relationship, some did acknowledge their rage, abuse and violence as instrumental in driving out their partner. In essence, for the men interviewed the attempts at seeking intimacy and fulfillment in a relationship was disillusioning, tumultuous, and disastrous

**Continuation of processes during incarceration.** To some, Joe may not seem like the “typical inmate.” Some of the risk factors for incarceration are known to be: undereducated, single, and unemployed (Bartol & Bartol. 2011). Joe was married with children, educated, and had a career. Looking beyond the typical risk factors for incarceration, it can be seen that Joe is quite similar to the men in the study with the cyclical interplay of adaptive, maladaptive, and controlling behaviors. In referencing the men in the study collectively, such behaviors appear to be resistant to change as they were found to be prevalent during incarceration. Life in prison consists of routines and predictability. Instead of attempting to control their environment as they did prior to incarceration, the men are now being controlled in prison. Absent from the lives of the men are the distractions of pre-incarceration and the stress of maintaining an intimate



relationship. This set of circumstances provides the context for the cycle of behaviors to once again become active.

*Seeking during incarceration.* Seeking behavior was found to be prevalent during incarceration. The attempts to seek relationships during incarceration often consisted of reaching out to those active in their lives prior to incarceration. Some of the men shared how they had been able to reconcile relationships with stepfathers and absent fathers during incarceration. One expressed how, since being incarcerated, he and his mother have been able to develop a meaningful relationship. Others expressed attempts to reconnect with positive relationships prior to incarceration, such as former high school coaches. The majority of the men revealed their active attempts at seeking intimate relationships with women during their incarceration. This included establishing correspondence-based relationships with pen pals, reaching out to other women known prior to incarceration, and attempting to re-establish former relationships with past girlfriends.

It can be seen from the reports of the men that seeking or the re-establishing of relationships during incarceration appeared to be successful. A curious finding in this study was that many of the men shared they had successfully re-established a relationship with a former girlfriend. One described a relationship with a former high-school girlfriend, while another shared that his current love was someone he “messed with” many years ago. Still another described re-establishing a relationship with his “favorite ex.” In spite of the men sharing how they would mistreat earlier intimate partners, it appears they have seemingly romanticized the time they spent with these former girlfriends and lovers and have sought to reconnect during their incarceration.

***Overcoming during incarceration.*** As adults these men attempted to overcome deep, unresolved feelings of loss that included acting out the rage against others, being good to others to overcome their negative self-perception, and acquiring high value goods to increase their social status with others. Attempts to overcome a negative perception of self were predominant in the findings of this study. When speaking of the harm done that resulted in incarceration, many spoke of themselves in reference to “before” and “now,” indicating that they were better people than they were prior to incarceration. One man shared, “I wasn’t the monster I thought I was.” There were also many statements made throughout the interviews that they believe they are helpful and “always try to help people.” While the sentiment of being a good person and being incarcerated for violent offenses against others may seem ironic, it is not unusual. It has been found that people avoid acknowledging their shortcomings while connecting their personal attributes to good concepts (Cricher, Helzer, & Dunning, 2011). The Better Than Average Effect (BTAE) must also be considered when discerning the men’s belief that they are now “good people.” The BTAE is the finding “that people consistently evaluate themselves more favorably than an average peer on most trait characteristics” (Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2013, p. 397). Such trait characteristics considered in the BTAE include: being kind to others, honest, trustworthy, dependable, generous, compassionate, law abiding, self-controlled and moral. In examination of the BTAE with incarcerated men, Sedikides et al. found that incarcerated men rated themselves as better than average in relation to non-incarcerated individuals. There was one exception to their findings and that was law-abidingness, in which inmates rated themselves as equal to the average citizen.

***Blaming during incarceration.*** Rating themselves as better than the average citizen is not difficult to understand when considering the processes found with the men in this study. As

described earlier, blame is a mechanism to avoid personal responsibility. Blame of the intimate partner that was harmed continued during incarceration. Added to those being blamed during incarceration was “the system.” All blame to larger society was directed at the criminal justice system, indicating a perception that the men felt victimized by being incarcerated while claiming innocence of the crime committed or believing they should have been convicted of a lesser offense.

The presence of blame has an inverse relationship to accountability. Coordinated responses to intimate partner violence have become widespread and include arrest and court ordered treatment in an effort to increase offender accountability (Bledsoe, Sar, & Barbee, 2006). It has been found that arrest, coupled with treatment for partner violent men, have lower incidences of repeat violence, followed by men who were arrested with no court ordered treatment (Bledsoe et al., 2006). The belief is that holding men accountable for violence and abuse against an intimate partner “will stop their abuse or at least criminal abuse because they do not wish to risk jail or other real punishment” (Goldstein, 2012). From the findings of this study, I contend that arrest and real punishment, as referenced by Goldstein (2012) such as being ordered to serve a period of incarceration, does not promote offender accountability. As can be seen in the findings of this study of partner violent men, the cycle of learned behaviors as a response to loss are continuous. A portion of the men in this study have served long sentences extending beyond 20 years. Accountability for their actions is absent.

***Controlling behaviors.*** The men convicted of murder or attempted murder revealed more control tactics of the intimate partner in an attempt to control the intimate relationship. These violent crimes were conveyed by the men as a spontaneous act of rage, occurring when or shortly after the intimate partner decided to terminate the relationship. This can be seen in one

man's account of the relationship ending. "I was angry and I didn't think. I didn't think about all the consequences. It was just a reaction whereas I had previously a couple of days before that thought about ending my own life." (Mike). When asking Mike if this was the first time he had considered suicide, his response was "Yup." He further explained that he was considering suicide because of "the stress of the relationship ending." While Mike explained the crime as "a reaction," he later disclosed that he knew the relationship was ending. Mike's quotes were highlighted earlier in chapter 4, indicating the intimate partner "talked him off his job," meaning he left his job to go see her. Using Mike's narrative as an example, it can be seen that Mike's conviction of attempted murder was not "just a reaction" as he described but that he knew the relationship was ending. It is questionable as to whether Mike had a weapon on him while "at his job" at a social services agency or if he retrieved his weapon in route to see his girlfriend.

Mike's explanation of the attempted murder of his girlfriend is not unlike other descriptions offered by the men in this study convicted of murder or attempted murder.

Three of the men 'happened to have' a gun with them at the time of the offense. Another took a firearm to the estranged wife's apartment. When the weapon failed to fire, he beat her to death with the firearm. Two others had a knife on their person when *seeking* the former intimate partner. For those who disclosed the events leading up to and the act of taking the life of the former intimate partner, it was disclosed that they believed the termination of the relationship was a significant experience of immediate loss, however the act of taking or attempting to take the life of the estranged intimate partner did not occur in the immediate moments of the relationship ending. The continuum of controlling behaviors can be seen ranging from verbal abuse to homicide. That men who kill their intimate partner have an extreme fear of abandonment is considered to be myth by Bancroft (2002), citing that "postseparation homicides

of intimate partners are committed almost exclusively by men” (p. 41). Such controlling behaviors are assessed by Bancroft (2002) as entitlement with abusive men believing that what they say, what they want, and when it should happen needs to occur how and in the time frame they dictate. Entitlement includes the expectation of rewards and maintaining self-importance (Daddis & Brunell, 2015). While entitlement or being entitled is a description of partner violent men embracing male privilege in the IPV literature (Bancroft, 2002), the findings of this study suggest that all men who attempt to control their partner as feeling entitled limits the consideration of other potential causal factors of IPV that can include trauma-induced fear and the way men learn to interact with their internal and external world.

**Consequences.** These men’s significant childhood experience of loss and the ensuing behaviors to heal or avoid the emotional turmoil it instigated led to failed adaptive and maladaptive interpersonal patterns of behavior. As children, many lost all sense of connection or attachment to their parents others ended up in the criminal justice system and still others became addicted to alcohol or illegal drugs.

In adulthood, these men seemed to have no difficulty in starting and establishing relationships with women. Yet, in spite of the attempted coping mechanism, as described by the primary dimensions, their deep fear of being rejected and losing the relationship led to violent and catastrophic consequences for themselves and their partners. For some men in this sample, paradoxically, only by murdering or attempting murder of their partner removed the perceived threat of being left. Of course, in this sample, all the IPV men were incarcerated as a consequence of their actions with some serving a life sentence and others serving multiple prison sentences prior to the current incarceration. With incarceration, the men explained a loss of connection with the world external to the correctional institution; however, they also continued

to seek some type of relationship during incarceration. The relationships established during incarceration were safe in that they did not have to deal with the intimacy of a romantic relationship outside of writing letters and making phone calls. The relationships established were superficial and structured, thereby protecting them from their impulses. While incarcerated, they can believe and/or portray themselves as good with little threat of engaging maladaptive processes within the relationship.

### **Grounding Theory in Extant Literature**

Grounded theory posits that the lived experiences of those engaged in the phenomenon of interest provide the foundation for the creation of theory. Once data collection and analysis had been completed, I returned to the extant IPV literature to consider what could be ascertained directly from the data. Many of the earlier findings of partner violent men were prevalent in this exploratory study. The IPV literature is populated with men's denial and minimization concerning their abuse against their partner(s) (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002; Fenton & Rathus, 2011; Smith, 2007). Considering that most of the existing literature has been conducted on probation populations, in comparison, incarcerated men share the same explanations of IPV as do probation populations of battering behavior. Such explanations are extreme minimizations of the abuses against an intimate partner or absolute denials of the abuse committed. Every interview included elements of depersonalizing the victims while portraying themselves in a positive light, "claiming positive characteristics while denying negative ones" (Wood & Forest, 2011). Of the social processes engaged by the men, blaming and controlling are prevalent throughout the IPV literature concerning partner violent men (Pence & Paymar, 1984; Walker, 1979).

The findings of this study as represented in the theoretical matrix are supportive of and add to the existing theories of IPV. Loss was significant in this study, whereas the IPV literature pertaining to partner violent men typically focuses on witnessing IPV in the family of origin as a risk factor (Dutton, 1999; Godbout et al., 2009). The social processes of seeking and disengaging are also possible areas of future research. In an attempt to expand the profile of incarcerated partner violent men in a more comprehensive manner, I propose three theoretical propositions to be considered for future study concerning IPV.

**Theoretical proposition one: The impact of childhood stressful and traumatic events and the implications for relationship formation throughout the life course.** In the second chapter I explored the literature pertaining to the histories of partner violent men and their exposure to violence in the family of origin. While some of the incarcerated men disclosed witnessing acts of violence and being the recipient of abuse as a child, the men's accounts of such events were broadly referenced and not very detailed. The focus of the men's narratives in this study centered on significant loss that began in childhood. Significant loss experiences in childhood was noted by Carlson and Shafer (2010) as substantial among inmate populations in general and possibly associated with violence, criminal behavior, and arrests at an early age.

Neuroscience research informs us that traumatic or repeated stressors in childhood can interrupt normal development and can have an adverse impact on behavioral and social problems (Anda et al., 2006). Examination and analyses of the data in this study leads me to conclude that loss, such as parental loss in childhood, was defined by the men as significant. Such losses can also adversely affect early attachment processes.

Attachment theorists proclaim that adult attachments are derived from early childhood experiences and that these experiences guide "attention, memory, affect in social situations,

appraisal of social situations, and romantic partners (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997, p. 315). Attachment can also be described as “the mechanism by which early attachment experiences affect a person throughout life” (Feeney & Noller, 1996, p. 91). It is well documented that attachments develop in childhood, typically with the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1973). The patterned development of internal working models impacts not only the adult romantic relationships, but also affect and appraisal of social situations. Such internal working models are used to understand the environment and predict one’s interaction with the environment (Marvin & Britner, 2008). Attachment is measured as secure or insecure. Insecure attachments are differentiated as anxious, avoidant or disorganized. The general processes of activation of the attachment dimensions provide for varying cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes according to established dominant attachment dimensions.

There are implications for the consideration of attachment theory and incarcerated men having past violence against an intimate partner. While attachment dimensions were not measured, evidence of avoidant attachment characteristics can be seen throughout the narratives of the men. Attachment is activated upon the experience of loss (Bowlby, 1973). The core dimension of this study was the experience of loss. Bowlby (1973) contends that loss is experienced with a primary caregiver; however avoidant attachment has been expanded by Muller (2010) and is characterized by “the minimization of hurtful experiences” (p. 2). Connecting avoidant attachment directly to the interview data, minimization can be seen in Keith’s description of being picked on as a child. “Because I was always a really small kid and I used to get picked on by the kids in the neighborhood too. I’m sure that had a toll on me, I’m sure that did something to me, but it never really bothered me. It just would be, Okay, well I



can't hang out with these guys." (Keith). A series of minimizations can be seen in Ray's description the loss of multiple intimate relationships.

Because me and my ex-wife wasn't doing to well, or whatever. The relationship was over

Then I subsequently left there because of a relationship I had with a young lady, whatever, because it was no big thing.

An in 02 I got involved with another young lady and subsequently we had some differences of opinion.

I did that for a year. Her grown children came home. That didn't work. We subsequently went our separate ways in 2004 or 2005. (Ray)

Ray's accounts for four different relationships in four different cities. Ray was very intentional in his attempts to direct the course of the interview, deflecting to his military career and his brother who is serving a life sentence in prison. Keith was dismissive and void of any emotional meaning in his recollection of being picked on as a child, illustrative of avoidant attachment (Muller, 2010). We can also see Keith's description of childhood in which he "suppressed a lot of stuff," leaving large gaps of memory. "But then there's a large period of time where I don't remember hardly anything. So I think I suppressed a lot of stuff. I know he (stepfather) was really violent and he drunk a lot." This statement highlights an additional characteristic of avoidant attachment as described by Muller (2010) as the "inability to recall childhood events" (p. 15).

Those individuals who are associated with the attachment avoidant dimension typically possess internal working models that hold a positive view of self and a negative view of others. A series of positive statements of the self were offered by the men and included: "I've always been a driven person" (Alex) and "I'm a very intelligent person. Sometimes I wish I wasn't as smart as I was" (Keith). Another holds a positive view of himself with "Yeah. My institution

record ain't really been that bad. I make wine" (Phil). Phil's statement of his institution record not being that bad contrasts with his current situation of being housed in a high security correctional institution.

Statements made by the men also highlight avoidant attachment characteristics in their negative view of others. Matt expresses a tone of negativity in describing his wife after leaving the relationship. "Now she don't even want the kids no more. She's really far gone" (Matt). Keith expressed his distrust in a former girlfriend in describing, "I met a woman who came out of an "abusive" relationship so she had said." Matt and Keith, along with the other interview participants, all offered particularly negative descriptions of their former intimate partners.

Avoidant individuals focus their efforts on deactivating the attachment mechanisms to avoid their own emotional reactions (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). This deactivating, or distancing, is an attempt to manage their distress (Muller, 2010). The deactivating strategies provide for suppression of emotional reactions and the minimization of attachment-related experiences. The goal is proximity management; that of distancing oneself from the perceived threat (Muller, 2010). Of particular interest is that "Over time, this kind of defensive exclusion distorts perceptions and memories, as can be seen in many experiments" (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). The process of deactivating in an attempt to manage distress was found throughout and was labeled in this study as the primary dimension of disengaging. Running away, quitting school, infidelity, and leaving are all indicative of the men's proximity management and distancing themselves from painful situations. Intense deactivating strategies were seen in the interviews with two specific participants. Mike's deactivating strategies were seen in chapter four in referring to the girlfriend he shot as "this individual." Another man in the study refused

to say the name of the girlfriend he murdered. When asked during the interview, he agreed to make up a name to use in referring to her throughout the remainder of the interview.

This study examined men's accounts of early childhood experiences and their understanding of how they became abusive to an intimate partner. Although validated instruments were not used in this study to measure attachment, insecure attachment, specifically avoidant attachment, with this offender population is suggested. As referenced in chapter two, attachment theory is a recent consideration to addressing intimate partner violence and has not been embraced entirely into treatments for batterers. Although the sample size was small, a study conducted by Lawson (2010) combined Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) with Psychodynamic Therapy (PT) for treatment of partner violent men with insecure attachment. The results were found to reduce attachment avoidance and severe IPV. The findings in this study would suggest further inquiry in to the considerations of childhood traumatic events and the implications of attachment theory for providing a more comprehensive approach to the treatment of incarcerated partner violent men.

The rage expressed in adulthood was largely expressed toward an intimate partner; however, some of the men also shared that they lived a violent lifestyle and that their violence would be expressed toward other men. It warrants noting that none of the men are incarcerated for offenses against a male and that the rage, resulting in murder or attempted murder for a portion of the men interviewed, were offenses against the female intimate partner.

**Theoretical proposition two: Ecological systems theory holds promise as a framework for addressing IPV.** As stated in chapter two, ecological understanding of IPV posits that behavior is shaped by individual relationships and the social surroundings (Ali & Naylor, 2013). In re-examining the model of the Ecological Systems Theory (EST), the findings

of this study touch all levels of EST and have implications for this model. Concerning the ontogenetic level of EST, the forces at work within the individual is the significant sense of loss in childhood. This loss has a developmental impact on children.

Although the effects of parental separation/loss will vary from child to child and family to family, the negative impact this has can be minimized if the child can live in an environment that is supportive to the grieving process and able to offer an explanation and understanding of his life event. (Hois, 2016, p. 1)

In continuing the examination of loss during childhood, Hois (2016) continues with “If he believes he has lost all control over his life, he is likely to become either suicidal or to act out in a variety of antisocial ways” (p. 1). The ontogenetic development is dependent upon the environment in and the psychology of caretakers (Seidle-de-Moura & Fernandes Mendes, 2012, p. 4). We can see that ontogenetic development is nested within the microsystem, which include the interactive patterns within the family.

Interviews revealed the loss of a parent and recollected how they believed they had not only lost a parent, but many of the men expressed a sense of loss with the custodial parent also. One respondent expressed, “Mom was gone a lot. She’d sleep most of the day and she’d go waitress at night. She’d work at night.” This description of home life explains the microsystem that represents the interactive patterns in family life. Another representation from the interviews describes the lack of interaction with his father after his mother’s suicide, explaining “And I went to school, my dad just dropped us off at my grandma’s so I never really knew much about him when I was little.” These quotes are representative of family interactions for the incarcerated men.

Within the mesosystem, which is made up of “a system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 521), social support mitigates the effects of negative life events and includes the immediate environment. The social supports sought by the incarcerated men

included older peers, typically those involved in illegal drug use, alcohol abuse, and engaging in violence. The social supports did not mitigate, but rather aggravated, the negative life events as found in the analyses of the interviews.

The exosystem represents formal and informal structures that indirectly influence (Belsky, 1980). The exosystem includes stressful life events. Such events, as described in the interviews were conflict in the marriage or relationship, the birth of children, and for some of the men, illegal activities that resulted in prior incarcerations in jails and prison. Lastly, the macrosystem, representing informal and explicit cultural beliefs, was evidenced in the interviews. Phil described how he would frequently fight with other men when he was “in the streets.” When asked what he liked about fighting, he responded, “Humiliating them and beating their ass.” In conforming to societal stereotypes of men in prison, Matt referenced how he planned to return to society. “I went to prison and I was just . . . I’m going to get bigger, badder, stronger, meaner, this and that.” The statements made by Phil and Matt reflect attempts to conform to societal standards of masculinity.

Being imbedded primarily in religious and legal thought (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), the men subscribed to the cultural expectations of marriage and having children. An interviewee summed up his marriage in stating, “Pretty much it was doomed from the beginning” All of the men expressed a lack of relationship satisfaction once the relationship progressed beyond the initial dating. They, however, were married because they believed it was culturally expected.

Ecological systems theory (EST) embraces all aspects of how individuals perceive and interact with multiple environmental systems. This study finds the men’s perceptions and behaviors nested and interactive with each level of EST, indicating that treatments for partner violent men incorporate all levels in attempts to reduce or eliminate IPV.

**Theoretical proposition three: Seeking behaviors of incarcerated men may influence the quality of intimate relationships and the possible impact on recidivism.** The effects of incarceration vary among individuals; however all incarcerated persons must adjust to rigid institutional policies, routines, the deprivation of privacy, and the loss of autonomy (Haney, 2001). Essentially, incarceration is a source of distress for the majority of incarcerates. In considering the context of incarceration, we can see the activation of social processes similar to those observed with the loss of a parent and the loss of an intimate partner.

The incarcerated men were deliberate in their attempts to overcome the confines of the prison. The process of overcoming resulted in seeking outside connections, typically connections with the opposite sex. A common relationship that was being sought by the incarcerated men was an intimate relationship with a woman, or women. In taking a closer look at the social process of seeking during incarceration, we can see a re-emergence of pre-incarceration behavior.

What is unique to the condition of incarceration is that some of the social processes typically engaged in by the men are built into living in prison. Correctional institutions have specific policies on who may enter outside of inmates and staff members. Visitors must go through an approval process and are limited as to when they can visit. Coupled with the impact of isolation during incarceration, Haney (2001) finds “that the disincentive against engaging in open communication with others that prevails there has led them to withdraw from authentic social interactions altogether” (p. 2). There is a compounding effect of incarceration on those who typically disengage from social interactions in an effort to avoid distress. Considering this with the deliberate actions of seeking relationships during incarceration, one has to wonder about

the true growth and development of the incarcerated men's abilities to establish healthy, mutual intimate relationships.

Upon establishing a prison relationship, questions arise pertaining to the quality of the relationship. Are they utilitarian solely during incarceration as a way to escape the boredom and routines of institutional life? It must also be considered that the relationships are superficial and ambivalent, with a fair amount of control of the relationship being placed with the offender. While the offender is not able to dictate the frequency of visiting, the offender has control of telephone contact due to correctional institution policies preventing outsiders to make phone calls to offenders.

In the event the prison relationship fails during incarceration, the process of disengaging requires no effort. It is built in to the condition of incarceration. If he wishes to terminate or actively disengage from the relationship, the offender can withhold phone calls, letters, and refuse visits, which is another form of controlling the relationship. For the men in this study that established relationships with women during incarceration, they were ultimately terminated by the woman. This resulted in the offender blaming her. One of the men shared, "I paid for her citizenship and she hid that she was pregnant and stopped visiting," while another discussed his girlfriend breaking up with him three weeks prior to his release. "She just couldn't hang on for three more weeks." Here it can be seen that the social processes adopted in childhood, have remained continuous in to adulthood and incarceration.

Efforts to understand the nature and quality of relationship seeking during incarceration, and the potential impact of such relationships on recidivism, can aid in programming during incarceration and post-release success.

## **Implications for Leadership Practice**

Independent batterer intervention programs have been the standard process for addressing partner violent men. With this comes the implicit assumption of that treatment equals cure. In consideration of the dimensions discovered within this study, further considerations of batterer intervention need to span multiple areas of focus over the course of incarceration and post-release. Recommendations for leadership of a batterer intervention system within a department of corrections should include pre-interventions, intervention, and post-interventions that would allow for a more holistic approach to addressing the issues of incarcerated men with a history of intimate partner violence. All of the men experienced significant loss during childhood. Exploration in addressing the grief process for those who have experienced significant loss and/or trauma can assist in eliminating the stagnated development of healthy coping mechanisms. It is also important to recognize that some of the actions found, such as disengaging and seeking behaviors resulting from significant loss that began in childhood be considered essential for inclusion in pre-intervention efforts.

Pre-interventions to a batterer intervention system within departments of correction can effectively incorporate a process for the men that works to acknowledge and heal from personal losses and devaluation of such critical relationships as parents and intimate partners.

Pre-intervention must also include addressing the criminal thinking errors or general criminal behavior of incarcerated men. Many of the men in this study were convicted of multiple offenses that included: burglary, illegal manufacturing of chemicals, arson, and failure to comply. Their lifestyle prior to incarceration was not pro-social. Prioritizing and incorporating such programming in to a systematic approach to addressing intimate partner violence with incarcerated men can assist in preparing the men for the work of engaging in a



batterer intervention. Simply addressing the criminal thinking errors or general criminal behavior will not effectively address issues of intimate partner violence.

With pre-intervention in place, the men assigned to batterer intervention can possibly be more prepared to undertake the work of addressing the abusive and violent behaviors that brought them to incarceration. With this, identification of men with a history of intimate partner violence is critical considering that men with various offenses of conviction have a history of abusive and violent behaviors against an intimate partner and largely go unnoticed for needing batterer intervention.

Post-interventions can include peer support and sponsorship, similar to the structure of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), in an effort to assist men with persistent relationship conflict and fear of rejection and loss. Avenues for assistance in acknowledging, addressing, and overcoming abuse and violence in an intimate relationship are limited primarily to court-mandated processes. With the finding in this study of the men's continual search for male peer support and father figures, leadership practices would include the creation of a batterer intervention system to provide meaningful, ongoing support for partner violent men.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provided support for some of the existing theories of intimate partner violence, other findings in the study suggest further exploration. One area of examination is to investigate the differences between community and incarcerated partner violent men. It is possible that differences exist between the two populations. Incarcerated partner violent men typically, as seen in this study, can have a variety of offenses other than IPV. Community batterer interventions may not be sufficiently comprehensive to address the complexities of intimate partner violence in addition to other criminal behaviors for incarcerated men. Discovery

of differences between the two populations can assist in the development of population-specific interventions.

The inmate participants all described a continuum of significant loss throughout childhood. Attempts to overcome the loss in the form of social processes lead to maladaptive behaviors and underdeveloped coping mechanisms that continued in to adulthood and included destructive interpersonal processes in intimate relationships. The discourse utilized to describe significant loss in childhood was that of being harmed and neglected. The same deflection was largely used to describe the failed intimate relationships in adulthood, being void of any personal responsibility. Of the men that discussed attempts to obtain formal help via counseling in an attempt to repair the intimate relationship, the blame for the failure of the relationship was placed on the partner, as was similar in blaming parents in childhood. Of those that had a history of abuse against an intimate partner, none had participated in a batterer intervention prior to incarceration, nor had they undergone any programming or interventions to assist with their self-identity, interpersonal patterns of behavior, or mental model of intimate relationships prior to or during incarceration. The men believed that simply serving a period of incarceration was the antidote to their abusive and violent behaviors against the intimate partners.

Time, meaning *prison time*, is what the men used for sense-making of their personal histories; however when discussing plans for release or the hope of eventual release, many of the men described a continuation of the pre-incarceration behavior. One of the interviewees who described his being “close-mouthed” as a weakness also outlined his preparation for his release. Being incarcerated for attempted murder, he described a withdrawal from participating in meaningful group activities within the correctional institution, specifically stating he was “getting rid of attachments.” This same offender discussed his intimate relationship possibilities,

expressing that numerous women were interested in an intimate relationship upon his release, implicitly indicating he was suitable for an intimate relationship. Another stated he “wasn’t going to be on anyone’s caseload,” indicating his refusal to seek formal methods of mental health assistance during incarceration. The men appeared to believe that incarceration alone has eliminated their abusive, violent behaviors against intimate partners. This was succinctly expressed with a statement of one interviewee convicted of murder with “I think I could be a damn good husband if given the chance.” Serving a period of incarceration is therefore believed by the men to heal the wounds of childhood and the offenses of adulthood and yet the findings are reflective of deeply held wounds that continue to direct behavior of rejection, control, and violence.

It is noteworthy to highlight what was *not* said in the course of the interviews with incarcerated men. While the focus of the interviews was to explore early childhood relationships and how they have possibly impacted abuse and violence against women, the men exclusively shared negative personal histories of their childhood and relationships with intimate partners. Absent from the life narratives of the offenders were pleasant memories or events of childhood and adulthood. Also absent were indicators of a connection or attachment with a family member or intimate partner. The intimate relationships were often referred to as “doomed for failure” or referenced in a passivizing way, such as “we subsequently had a difference of opinion.”

Narrative criminology is an approach that seeks to position narratives as precursors to crime (Pressor, 2009). It seeks inquiry in to the narrative of offenders beyond simply a recounting of life history and “positions the narrative itself, as opposed to simply the events reported in the narrative, as a factor in the motivation for and accomplishment of crime and criminalization” (Pressor, 2009, p. 178). Such things omitted from the men’s conversations

were discussions of respect for the intimate partner(s), concern for the well-being of the intimate partners, and the impact of their lifestyle on the children and partner(s). Additionally, the men indicated their efforts in seeking a meaningful intimate relationship; however, the chosen lifestyle of infidelities, abuse and selling of drugs, abuse of alcohol, and engaging in a lifestyle that works against having a meaningful relationship displays how the men essentially were engaging in behaviors against their own interests and desires. Therefore what is said, the conditions and social bias in which it is presented, and the absence of narrative, can assist in developing an approach to understanding crime and the motivating factors that lead to offenses against persons and society. In this study, I looked at a conceptual and theoretical context; however looking at the data within the framework of narrative criminology could yield abundant results.

An important aspect of this study are the crimes for which the men are currently incarcerated. While some of the men were convicted of obvious crimes against an intimate partner, such as domestic violence, violation of a protection order, and menacing by stalking, many of the men were convicted of offenses that are not considered indicative of IPV. Crimes that occur in which the offense behavior was against an intimate partner are largely unrecognized as being related to IPV. Looking at the *mens rea*, meaning criminal intent, can reveal the intentionality of such offenses of conviction and expose that the immediate precursors to crime indicate purposeful acts of violence and abuse against the intimate partner. In an effort to truly create pathways for successful offender reentry, departments of corrections can increase their efforts in addressing such offense behaviors that often remain hidden behind the revised codes of law.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was confined to the lived experiences of 15 participants who are incarcerated within Ohio correctional institutions. One of the primary limitations of this study was the inclusion solely of male offenders from Ohio. While the study aims to include offenders from urban, rural, and suburban areas of Ohio, this study was limited to a mid-western male population, excluding populations from other geographic areas of the United States.

Another limitation of the study is that the population consists only of those incarcerated men with a known history of intimate partner violence from the current offense of conviction. Typically, there is limited access to resources of recidivistic behavior (Hilton, Harris, Popham, & Lang, 2010) and thus, those offenders who had been re-incarcerated for a parole or post-release control violation due to domestic violence were not included in this study. This study is also likely to have missed those offenders who have a history of domestic violence offenses that did not result in a period of incarceration. Such offenders may have been incarcerated for an offense not related to domestic violence, despite evidence that the most severe and persistent offenders of intimate partner violence also generally commit other antisocial acts (Hilton et al., 2010). This study did not seek the perspectives of corrections professionals or the victims of crime due to the focus of the study being the etiology of IPV from the perspective of incarcerated men.

This study did not include measurement of offender psychopathy with mental health disorders, to include personality disorders, and will remain unidentified within the study. With this limitation subgroups of batterers as found in quantitative studies (Chiffriller et al, 2006; Mauricio & Lopez, 2009) will most likely remain undifferentiated.

## Conclusion

All the suggestions for future research are not intended to reduce IPV to a single perspective, assigning one or few causal factors to the phenomenon. A single profile of the male batterer over simplifies the complexity of IPV and is not realistic (O'Neil & Harway, 1997). It encompasses multiple causes and crosses into multiple disciplines to include psychology, sociology, and criminology. Loss was found to be significant in this study; however the issues surrounding childhood loss may not be a risk factor for all men who are violent against an intimate partner. Wood (2004) states that men's violence and control of intimate partners has been based on the researcher's labeled meanings and motives. She suggests future research should aim at understanding violence and control from the perspectives of men who commit these crimes. Expanding the focus to men in furthering effective batterer intervention systems does not exclude women, the experiences of battered women, or the services to women. The two issues are separate, but critical for both partner violent men and battered women in reducing the pervasive prevalence of IPV in our culture. This study looked at men's accounts of abuse and violence against women and provided corroboration for more recent thought in addressing IPV. A final interpretive assumption of this study is that the overall findings support treatment approaches, such as attachment theory and ecological systems theory that do not reduce treatment to only addressing IPV, but rather encompass a holistic, multilevel approach to ending abuse against women.

## Appendix

## Appendix A

### Human Subjects Review Research Committee Approval

# Ohio | Department of Rehabilitation & Correction

John R. Kasich,  
Governor  
Gary C. Mohr, Director

Kathleen A. Lamb, Ph.D.  
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation  
and Correction 770 West Broad St.  
Columbus, OH 43222

Friday, September 4, 2015

Ms. Roxanne Swogger  
147 Main Street  
Butler, OH 44822

Dear Ms. Swogger,

I am pleased to inform you that the Human Subjects Research Review Committee has approved your proposal, "Incarcerated Men and the Etiology of Intimate Partner Violence." We believe that your study will provide a valuable contribution to the literature on this timely issue.

We have one minor suggested change on the consent form, which is to list your title as "Ph.D. Candidate in Leadership and Change." The revised version of your proposal addresses the committee's concerns, and we look forward to seeing the results. In accordance with agency policy, we advise to use your university email address in institutional correspondence regarding your dissertation, and to do your research on your own time away from your job duties at ORW.

I will get final approvals from each of the institutions from which you plan to collect inmate data, and send them to you as they are received. If you have further questions or need assistance, please contact me by phone or email.



Sincerely,

Kathleen A. Lamb, Ph.D.  
Human Subjects Research Review Committee  
Chair

---

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## Appendix B

### Officer Consent Form

#### Grounded Theory Interview

##### *Identification of Investigator and Purpose of the Study*

You are being asked to participate in a study conducted by Roxanne Swogger from Antioch University. The purpose of the study is to understand childhood family relationships and the impact those relationships may have in intimate relationships in adulthood. This study will contribute to the student's completion of her doctoral dissertation.

##### *Research Procedures*

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. The second phase of this study will consist of an interview in which you will be asked questions related to your childhood and your romantic relationships. The answers you provide will not be associated with your name. I plan to audiotape your responses to these questions with your permission. Audiotape will be transcribed with pseudonyms and then destroyed. You have the option to participate in the interview without being audiotaped. Any information you provide will remain confidential throughout the entirety of the research project and will be destroyed upon completion.

##### *Time Required*

Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time.

##### *Risks*

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risk from your participation in this study. Should you experience any emotional or psychological discomfort, referral to a mental health professional or institutional Chaplain can be made by the investigator.

##### *Benefits*

Potential benefits from participation in this study include helping to learn more about the role early childhood experiences may play in the lives of participants and the advantages and disadvantages of such experiences on adult romantic relationships. Information you provide may help guide others who may have interest in establishing effective programs. The results of this project will be labeled in such a way that the participant's identity will not be attached to the final writing of this project.

##### *Confidentiality*

The results of this research may be presented at academic conferences; however, data will be presented in a manner that will not reveal individual identities. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches individuals to their answers will be destroyed.

##### *Participation & Withdrawal*

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any individual question without consequences. Your participation is not a requirement of your

incarceration and your incarceration status will not be affected by your choice to participate. Your participation will have no impact on your release status or any other privileges.

*Questions about the Study*

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or if you would like to receive a copy of the final collective results of this study, please contact:

Roxanne Swogger  
Ph.D. in Leadership & Change  
Antioch University  
[rswogger@antioch.edu](mailto:rswogger@antioch.edu)

Elizabeth Holloway, Ph.D  
Antioch University  
[eholloway@antioch.edu](mailto:eholloway@antioch.edu)

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The researcher provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to participate in completing the questionnaire. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Copyright Permission

# INVOICE



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