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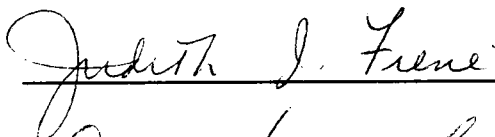
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by David Nelson Yarbrough entitled "A Socio-Demographic Profile and Qualitative Study of Court-Referred Perpetrators of Partner Abuse." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

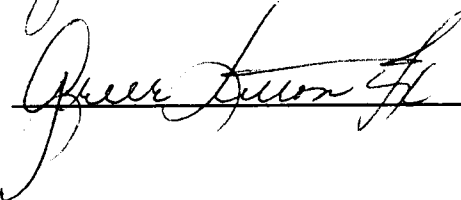


Priscilla Blanton, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor  
and Dean of the Graduate School

A SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
COURT-REFERRED PERPETRATORS OF PARTNER ABUSE

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David Nelson Yarbrough

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## ABSTRACT

This study provides a socio-demographic profile as well as a qualitative description of contextual themes of court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse. Ten perpetrators that had been adjudicated for domestic violence assault or harassment were interviewed separately and in depth. The perpetrators were asked to share their perceptions on issues surrounding relationships, parenting, gender-role, conflict resolution, and cultural beliefs. In addition, 286 clinical case records were analyzed in order to develop a demographic profile as well as provide comparisons between perpetrators that were able to complete the intervention program versus those that did not.

This study indicated that an absent father, overwhelmed mother, poor communication skills, and traditional and idealized gender roles are all themes in the perpetrators' life histories. Within those themes were elements of hostility, frustration, deprivation, and attachment.

This study also indicated that with court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse, there is an association with the use of alcohol, perpetrator employment history, and the level of violence in differentiating perpetrators who complete an intervention program from those that do not.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Evidence has been presented that the modern social movement prohibiting violent behavior from husbands to wives began in Alabama in 1871. At that time the Alabama court maintained that it was unlawful for a husband to "beat [his wife] with a stick, to pull her hair, choke her, spit in her face or kick her about the floor, or to inflict upon her like indignities" (quoted in Browne, 1987, p. 167). While the gauntlet had been tossed, few states took up the challenge to defend the rights of women against violent domination by their spouses. In fact, it has only been about fifteen years since the court systems have consistently found wife battering to be a criminal offense (Gondolf & Fisher, 1990). Even with this recent advent of judicial acknowledgement of domestic violence and the possibility of more pro-active intervention, it has been reported recently that "at least 1 out of 6 [women] in the United States is abused every year by the man with whom she lives" (Avis, 1992, p. 227), and over a third of all American women are abused by their male partner at some time during their lives (Avis, 1992; Gondolf & Fisher, 1990).

It has now been one hundred and twenty-three years since the first official laws were passed addressing

violence against wives from their husbands. Even so, the short fifteen years of more active intervention has only just begun to address the question, "Who are the men who perpetrate partner violence?" The purpose of this study was to offer a socio-demographic profile of the male court-referred perpetrator of partner abuse, and qualitatively to identify and examine possible themes associated with violent behavior from men to women in intimate relationships.

### Rationale

Much of what is currently believed to be true about male perpetrators of relationship violence emerges from five primary sources of information. These sources are:

1. Clinical descriptions drawn from treatment populations of batterers or victims.
2. Psycho-sociological assessments drawn from observations of batterers or victims.
3. Anecdotal accounts of domestic violence.
4. Law enforcement statistics and records.
5. Conclusions drawn from surveys of community representative samples not specific to "perpetrator" or "victim" populations.

The current basis for clinical and psycho-social assumptions about the characteristics of the male batterer are best articulated in the works of Dobash and Dobash

(1979), and Lenore Walker (1979). These early descriptive presentations posited the now accepted idea that the male batterer was violently coercive in his attempt to gain and maintain control in the relationship and "believes" that his violent behavior should not produce negative consequences. In addition, Walker (1979) presented a list of observed characteristics of batterers that included:

1. low self esteem,
2. traditional and stereotypical belief in gender roles,
3. pathological jealousy,
4. frequent use of sex as an act of aggression, and
5. abuse of alcohol.

The descriptions of male batterers have been expanded to include demographic data suggesting that the majority of male abusers were white, married, and blue-collar, with at least a high school education (Hamberger & Hastings, 1986). While these characteristics may prove to be true, the fundamental limitations with these descriptions are that they were primarily drawn from the reports of battered women who presented in protective shelter populations and from observations of those men who "voluntarily" attended some form of clinical intervention.

Current psychological and sociological assessments of batterers, based on the earlier work of Dobash and Dobash (1979) and Walker (1979), have been on-going and

inconclusive. Gondolf (1988) presented his version of a behavioral typology that included the:

1. "extremely abusive" *sociopathic batterer*,
2. physically and verbally abusive *antisocial batterer*,  
and the
3. "less severe" *typical batterer*.

Gondolf believed that this typology substantiated victims' reports presented by Walker (1984) "suggesting" the presence of personality types that were prone to violence.

A recent review of psychological dissertation studies attempting to classify, type, and differentiate male batterers by personality traits and/or characterological disorders, have been consistent in noting the presence of measurable personality disorders in clinical samples of batterers (see Beasley, 1991; Offutt, 1989; Wilcox, 1992;). While these studies suggest that psychological differentiation may be a valid avenue to travel, the studies have been sporadic and acceptance has been minimal. The majority of recent publications in the area of battering maintain sociological bases for abuse in relationships. Even so, there has been disagreement about the specific theoretical explanations of the etiology of relationship violence.

Clinical and psycho-social explanations of domestic violence are complex and multi-faceted.

Walker's (1979 & 1984) work suggested traits that were consistent with diagnosed psychopathology. This was directly challenged by Dobash and Dobash (1979) who suggested a "batterer forgiving" culture that socialized individuals to accept the subjugation of women. Gondolf (1988) asserted that there may be both pathology and socialization involved. This is countered by a host of studies by Gelles, Straus, and others (reviewed in Gelles & Loseke, 1993) that suggest that some form of domestic violence may be a common behavior that takes place in up to fifty percent of American marriages. Thus the psychological versus the sociological lines are clearly drawn between describing what is "normal" behavior versus "abnormal" or pathological behavior.

Based on a computer database search addressing domestic violence publications (published after 1978), it appears that the current psychiatric and psychological study of domestic violence continues in the vein of a psychopathological model of abuse, whereas social scientists' approach more often posits socially based theoretical perspectives (i.e. exchange, learning, cognitive, feminist, & resource theories).

The continuing difficulty of finding the appropriate approach to identifying the characteristics of the domestic violence perpetrator only serves to accentuate recent publications which assert a need for greater conceptual

clarity and uniformity in how concepts are used. As noted by Tolman and Bennett (1990), "the overrepresentation of psychopathology in clinical battering populations does not clearly implicate psychopathology as a causal factor in battering" (p. 89). And, as Straus (1993) has indicated, the problem may not be an either/or argument as much as a combination of the two. A recent controversy articulated by Straus (1993) suggest that general population survey findings reveal a preponderance of violence in American families, but the rate of "*injury-producing* (italics added) assaults by husbands is [only] 3.7 per 1000...[and] the severe assault rate (or physical assault that does not produce physical injury) was 50 per 1,000 [couples surveyed] for assaults by husbands" (p. 69).

These findings suggested that while recent pro-active, pro-arrest policies have increased the rate of arrest for domestic violence assault, there are, in actuality, at least two different types of domestic violence. The first type is reflective of the astonishing fifty-percent of physical violence that is revealed by many surveys of married couples. As noted by Straus (1993), this type of violence may be "relatively minor and relatively infrequent" (p. 77) but still may be indicative of a culture with informal norms that support and encourage violent behavior. The second type, while occurring in smaller numbers of households, may be more indicative of the "cases known to

the police [and] shelters for battered women" (p. 77). This second type would be more likely to result in injury to the victim and the arrest of the perpetrator.

Beginning in 1981, communities actively engaged in working toward the cessation of violence against women proposed law enforcement pro-arrest policies and counseling-based interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ], 1992). Due to the stated goal of "breaking the cycle" of assaultive behaviors, these policies are quickly becoming an acceptable alternative to ignoring or incarcerating domestic violence perpetrators. A dilemma faced by these programs is grounded in the difficulty of differentiating between those perpetrators who might best be served with a counseling-based intervention and those who would not. If there are at least two identifiable types of domestic violence, are the current counseling interventions appropriate to both kinds of perpetrators?

The argument posited by Gondolf (1988) and forwarded by others (see Straus, 1993; Tolman & Bennett, 1990) that "battering" may, in reality, exist at two (or three) stable levels depending on the individual perpetrator, proposes an interesting question. Throughout the fifteen year process of working toward the cessation of violence against women and asking, "who are the men who batter?" we have made little headway in determining possible within-group

differences in the underlying etiologies of battering. So, the question regarding the "who" in domestic violence is certainly valid, and the psycho-sociological "why" of domestic violence remains in disarray. One possible approach for resolving some of the confusion is to continue the exploration beginning to be suggested by the social science community that advises the examination of within-group variation among perpetrators of domestic violence rather than continuing attempts to describe them from a moralistic perspective (see Straus, 1993).

#### Statement of the Problem

There is general agreement among clinicians that domestic violence is an "unacceptable norm" in our society. Effective intervention techniques require accurate and comprehensive descriptions of those men who are involved in domestic violence. The purpose of this study was to present a socio-demographic profile of the court-referred perpetrator of domestic violence as well as a variety of themes that characterize the perpetrators' lives, relationships, and experiences.

#### Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives for the proposed study were to formulate:

1. a socio-demographic profile drawn from case records of identified court-referred perpetrators;
2. a qualitative description of contextual themes drawn from individual interviews with identified court-referred perpetrators.

### Definitions

Since the advent of the modern study of domestic violence in 1979 (see Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979), there have been many attempts to clarify and define concepts used to describe domestic violence. This section addresses definitions of concepts used in the present study.

ADULT - There has yet to be clear guidelines set as to who is to be considered an adult, or charged with a crime as an adult, that are consistent from state to state. However, it is generally accepted that legal classifications of adult status fall between 18 and 21 years of age. This study utilized records and participants from a counseling-based program for perpetrators that identified adult status as 18 or more years of age. For that reason, this study generally refers to "adult status" as describing anyone who is over the age of eighteen.

ASSAULT - As with any legal definition, there is a broad spectrum of degrees associated with assault. This

study utilized the resources of a counseling-based program that was directly linked to a specific law enforcement and court system in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. For that reason, the broad definition of assault used was consistent with that used by the Tuscaloosa Police Department (TPD) and was defined as any means with malicious intent to do bodily harm (TPD, 1990). The distinguishing feature of assault is the intent behind the behavior.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - There is wide disagreement about the the specific content areas that should be included in a usable definition of domestic violence. Davis (1988) defined violence as "repeated forceful physical behavior by one partner in order to control the other partner" (p. 291). While this is consistent with the legal definition of assault that carries the aspect of intent, there are many annoying and threatening behaviors where intent is difficult or impossible to decipher. To this end, Adams (1989) has redirected the focus of defining domestic violence away from the actions of the perpetrator and toward the interpretation of the actions by the victim. Adams (1989) definition included "any act that caused the victim to do something she does not want to do, forces her to do something she does not want to do, or causes her to be afraid" (p. 3). The legal definition used by

the Tuscaloosa Police Department is defined as any attempt or "threat" of abuse or assault between family members (TPD, 1990). It would seem that some middle ground between the intent and action of the perpetrator and the perceptions of the victim all need to be considered in any definition of "domestic violence." For this study, domestic violence was defined as any act representing the domination and control of one family member over another family member with the intent of, or the perception of intent, of physical injury (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Nichols, 1986).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM (DVIP) - The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) has strongly supported the alliance between the court system and counseling-based programs for perpetrators of domestic violence toward the elimination of violent acts (NCJFCJ, 1992). This study used the resources of such a program. The Domestic Violence Intervention Program of Tuscaloosa, Alabama is defined as "the treatment component of an interagency effort to reduce the incidence of domestic violence" (Pogue, 1992, p. iv).

FAMILY MEMBER - Consistent with the State of Alabama guidelines involving domestic violence, a family member was defined as "spouses, former spouses, parents, children, or any other persons related by

blood or marriage; a person with whom the victim has a child in common or a present or former household member" (TPD, 1990, p. 3).

HARASSMENT - In order to fully recognize the scope of domestic violence on its victims, it is important to recognize that "intent" behind the violence is not always apparent. Because most legal definitions of assault include such intent to physically harm, it is necessary to differentiate between behavior with intent for harm verses behavior without such clear intent. According to Alabama State law, harassment involves behavior with intent to "annoy or alarm another person" (TPD, 1990, P. 13). This behavior can include verbal attacks as well as physically striking another person.

PATHOLOGY - Many modern studies directed toward the causes of domestic violence have included the notion that a characterological flaw or personality disorder may be present in the perpetrators of domestic violence (see Adams, 1989; Boye-Beaman, Leonard, & Senchak, 1993; Gondolf, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1990; O'Leary, 1993; Walker, 1979). This study defined the presence of pathology as enduring, inflexible, and maladaptive patterns of perceiving and thinking about the environment and oneself that causes "either significant functional impairment or subjective distress" (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p. 335).

PERPETRATOR - The participating treatment program serves both male and female adults that have been arrested for domestic violence assault or harassment charges in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. Even so, it is important to note that clear differences exist between the genders and the likelihood of injury to the victim (see Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Straus, 1991). In cross gender, intimate relationship violence, the woman-as-victim is more likely to be injured (see Fincham & Bradbury, 1990; Straus, 1991). It is for this reason that the present study focused exclusively on male perpetrators. The perpetrators were adult males arrested for male-to-female assault or harassment of a spouse, girlfriend, or otherwise identified adult household member.

VICTIM - Because this study utilized the resources of an on-going program for perpetrators of domestic violence, the victim was defined as the identified partner or spouse of the perpetrator, or the household member identified by the arresting agency as the person who was forced to do something they did not want to do, or was made afraid by the actions of the perpetrator.

WARRANTLESS ARREST or PRO-ARREST - It has been repeatedly noted that in order to facilitate effective interventions with the perpetrators of domestic violence, there needs to be active participation between law enforcement, the court systems, and

counseling programs (see Davis & Hagen, 1992; Ferrato, 1991;). As stated by Ferrato (1991), "men may stop physical abuse if they face arrest and sentencing, simply because they don't want to go to jail" (p. 86). Effective intervention would require police department and court system recognition of assault in the home as being the same as outside of the home. The Tuscaloosa Police Department policy is "to arrest persons found to be responsible for crimes in domestic/family violence situations. Arrests shall be made in domestic violence situations when the elements of crime exist. Dispute mediation or other police intervention techniques shall not be used as a substitute to arrest" (TPD, 1990, p. 1). It is through this policy that the "burden of proof" is removed from the victim and positioned as the responsibility of the arresting officer(s).

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It has been noted that American legal recognition of the deviant behaviors involved in domestic violence can be traced to 1871. Even so, it was not within the scope of this study to present a comprehensive review of all literary and legal references to the domestic violence perpetrator for the past 123 years. Instead, this overview of the domestic violence literature directed it's focus to the past 15 years beginning with Lenore Walker's (1979) groundbreaking work The Battered Woman. Her book is generally accepted as the basis of contemporary social science efforts directed toward a better understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. Furthermore, because the stated objective of this study was to develop a relatively broad description of perpetrators, the focus was additionally narrowed toward empirical work that attempts to describe and theoretical work that attempts to explain the behavior of perpetrators of domestic violence. It is important to note that clear differences exist between the genders in the level of violence used and the likelihood of injury to the victim (see Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Straus, 1991). In cross gender, intimate relationship violence, the woman-as-victim is more likely to be injured (see Fincham &

Bradbury, 1990; Straus, 1991). Intervention also is more likely in this situation. It was for those reasons that this study focused exclusively on male perpetrators.

### Current Theoretical Perspectives

The arena of domestic violence covers a broad range of behaviors including sibling fights and sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect, elder abuse, and adult relationship violence. Scholars in each of these areas utilize specific theoretical perspectives in an attempt to explain the numerous behaviors associated with each domain. As previously indicated, the limited scope of this study was directed toward a profile of the court-referred perpetrator of heterosexual partner abuse. This is an examination of "who are the men that batter" rather than "why."

The majority of theoretical approaches to domestic violence tend to address etiology. Even so, it is the utilization of those theoretical assumptions that clinicians, law enforcement agencies, and all who work to eliminate domestic violence begin to develop their demographic and characterological profiles. It is for this reason that it is important to review the most widely applied theoretical approaches to adult relationship violence.

The most frequently mentioned theoretical perspectives used to address the specific area of heterosexual partner

abuse are: (1) social exchange theory, (2) social learning / social cognitive theory, (3) feminist theory, (4) resource theory, (5) general systems theory, (6) subculture of violence theory, and (7) psychological theory. A brief overview of each of these theories as applied to domestic violence follows.

### Social Exchange Theory

"The proposition that people hit family members because they can is based on the principles of social exchange theory, which assumes that human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishments and costs" (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 22). Thus, exchange theory conceptualizes violent interaction as occurring when the rewards that are gained by the abusive behavior outweigh the costs (Burgess & Draper, 1989; Dutton, 1988; Gelles, 1993; Gelles & Straus, 1988). In Bandura's (1979) review of the empirical literature on the issue of external punishment, the elements of exchange theory were supported when he noted that aggression would decrease when there were alternative means available for rewards and the risk of punishment for aggression was high.

### Social Learning / Cognitive Theory

Social learning theory as initially conceptualized by Bandura and Walters (1959) involved the "development of

habitual response patterns that are acceptable in the society in which the individual lives" (p. 23). This "learning" process is developed through observation and imitation (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Evans, 1989; Grusec, 1992). Applied to violence, "social learning theory views biological factors, observational learning, and reinforced performance as the main origins of aggressive behavior" (Dutton, 1988, p. 44). As noted by Nichols (1986), family of origin experiences such as physical discipline and punishment may forge a connection "between love and violence and build into them the idea that violence is a legitimate way of solving problems or responding to stress" (p. 191). Waldo (1987) reports two contradicting degrees of learned behavior from the family of origin, suggesting that abusive families teach "[sons] not to be assertive because their efforts at assertion are usually punished. At the same time they learn, through modeling their fathers' behavior, that physical violence is an appropriate and effective way to exert authority" (p. 385).

### Feminist Theory

"A feminist perspective on violence in families requires that we first face the degree to which violence against women is a normal part of patriarchy, expected and condoned" (Avis, 1992, p. 227). The underlying premise in feminist theory as applied to domestic violence is not that

"we" are living in a violent culture, but rather that the nature of violence, dominance, and control is specifically directed from men to women in order to gain and maintain power (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo, 1993).

Kaufman (1992) noted that "battering is perceived as necessary behavior to maintain the appropriate order of things in what has historically been a hierarchical institution - the family" (p. 236). In the Gies and Gies (1987) historical account of marriage and the family, it is noted that in "late Rome, ninth-century Farfa, [and] fifteenth-century Tuscany...the father exercised to his final breath the authoritarian role that society imposed" (p. 297). It is this historical element of patriarchal power and the abuses of that power that are directly addressed in feminist theory. As noted by Goodrich (1991), the underlying theme of a feminist perspective is to challenge the structure of power and the abuses of power in relationships. "If [therapeutic interventions] cannot deal with power, then whatever else it may help or clarify, it works to keep inequity in place" (Goodrich, 1991, p. 20).

### Resource Theory

Resource theory "assumes that all social systems (including the family) rest to some degree on force or the threat of force. The more resources - social, personal, and economic - a person can command, the more force he or

she can muster" (Gelles, 1993, p. 37). However, it has been posited that the more resources a person *actually* has control of, the *less* violence is used in an open manner (Gelles, 1993). Thus, it may be that resource theory actually means that the perpetrator perceives a lack of resources and utilizes violence to assert control. This may well be consistent with the Gondolf and Fisher (1990) observation that some aspects of battering may be "an overcompensation for a distorted male ideal that [the batterer] feels obliged to fulfill" (p. 284).

#### General Systems Theory

General systems theory posits that there are "system" properties, either societal or familial, that predisposes an individual to violent acts. "General systems theory applied to family violence seeks to account for violence between family members by viewing the family as a goal-seeking, purposive, adaptive system" (Burgess & Draper, 1989, p. 67). Nichols (1986) noted that "family violence emerges from the nature and functioning of the family itself and from the nature of the society in which it is located, rather than from individual causes" (p. 190). It is the system operations of the family that can either "maintain, escalate, or reduce levels of violence" (Gelles, 1993, p. 36).

From a family systems viewpoint, the rigid and linear

concepts of the behavior of "a" perpetrator and "a" victim, is replaced with the concept of *circular causality* (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991). The concept of circularity posits that within the family system, there are "observable feedback loops" that rely not just on the actions of an individual, but also on the perceptions, reactions and interpretations that are assigned to each action. These perceptions and interpretations systemically influence resulting behavior patterns (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991, p. 108).

#### Subculture of Violence Theory

The subculture of violence theory, though not always referred to by name, "asserts that social values and norms provide meaning and direction to violent acts, and thus facilitate or bring about violence in situations specified by these norms and values" (Gelles, 1993, p. 38). This is reflected in the informal norms alluded to by Straus (1991) and Waldo (1987) that indicate that, as a society, the United States generally "condones, ignores, or conceals abusive behavior" (Waldo, 1987, p. 385), and finds it "normal for a husband or wife to slap the other 'on occasion'" (Straus, 1991, p. 27).

The subculture of violence theory is the "other side" of feminist theory and generally assumes that society is violent as opposed to violence specifically directed from

men toward women. A subculture of violence perspective posits that our culture supports the use of violence as an appropriate response to frustration and competition. We believe that violence is an effective way to solve problems or "might makes right."

### Psychological Theory

The psychological theory of domestic violence, as explained by Gelles (1993), is based on the "medical, or psychiatric model" that assumes some measure of individual or family-of-origin pathology of the perpetrator. Walker (1979) suggested some form of psychopathic personality that was manifested in a "violence prone" personality. The sophistication of current psychiatric diagnoses and explanations of personality disorders now "draw heavily" on aberrations explained by other identified theories such as social learning and social exchange theory (Gelles, 1993). Thus, the earlier psychopathological model has evolved to more of a psycho-social view of violence where pathology interacts with social factors to create violent behavior.

### Emerging Theoretical Perspectives

The contemporary study of domestic violence and development of the most effective and appropriate treatment interventions are still being refined, scrutinized, and modified. Since Lenore Walker's first study chronicling the

plight of the domestic violence victim fifteen years ago, there have been profound changes in the development of specific programs, the enforcement of assault law, the development of improved protective measures, and movement toward increased awareness and abhorrence of the crimes associated with domestic violence by society. I believe that the latter is well evidenced in the plethora of local and national news stories, as well as the daily documentation on daytime television talk programs.

Domestic violence awareness is experiencing tremendous growth. Certainly with that growth additional changes are inevitable. It is my belief that two current areas of study may prove invaluable to the advancement of knowledge about the dynamics of the violent individual and relationship. These areas are theories based on new work in attribution and physiology. A very brief overview follows.

### Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is considered a social psychological theory that asserts that there are global, internal, and stable cognitions assigned by one person to the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of a second person that influence the interpretations and reactions of the first person (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Burgess & Draper, 1989). To date, most of the research in the area of attributions in marriage has been directed toward the study of marital distress and

marital satisfaction. Many of the assumptions and findings, however, could be translated to the arena of the violent dyad. Bradbury and Fincham's (1990) review of attributions in marriage "support the conclusion that an association exists between marital satisfaction and the nature of attributions" (p. 15). Their review of a large number of studies for the period 1981-1989, indicated that for maritally distressed couples "causal and responsibility attributions...are likely to increase the impact of negative events and decrease the impact of positive events" (p. 29). While some qualitative studies have shown that battering men overcompensate "for a distorted male ideal that they feel obliged to fulfill" (Gondolf & Fisher, 1990, p. 284), the question that has confounded researchers for 15 years is why (for the most part) these perpetrators specifically continue to target only family members. Qualitative investigations with individual perpetrators, including an examination of batterer attributes assigned to his victim, might prove useful. It also might target an additional area for clinical application beyond the attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with the previously identified theory.

### Physiology

John Gottman's (1994) recent work attempting to develop clear predictor models for divorce, raised some interesting questions concerning the predictive patterns associated with

physiological arousal. Gottman (1994) noted that "controlling for the initial level of marital satisfaction, the more autonomically aroused couples were at Time 1, the more their marital satisfaction declined in 3 years" (p. 75). Gottman went on to note that previous studies by Ekman, Levenson, and Frieson (1983) identified a specific "autonomic signature of emotion" (quoted in Gottman, 1994, p. 75) that appeared to be easily replicated in similar or "relived" situations. Associated with these findings, Gottman indicated that nervous system activity and stress are likely to produce circumstances that allow for "reduced ability to process new information, a reliance on overlearned behaviors and cognitions, and a tendency to invoke fight and flight behaviors" (1994, p. 75).

Processes of male withdrawal patterns explored by Gottman have interesting application to violent behaviors when he asserted that withdrawing emotionally is not a characteristic of all "men." Instead, Gottman maintains that "in unhappy marriages men withdraw emotionally, whereas in happy marriages they do not (1994, p. 239). An explanation offered by Gottman on this "unhappy" withdrawal pattern may be a direct effect of slower autonomic nervous system [ANS] recovery after activation of the "fight or flight" syndrome associated with the ANS and the sympathetic nervous system.

Similar to the Gottman findings, Jacobson's (see Olney,

1994) four year study of domestic violence perpetrators indicated that there were a small percentage of perpetrators who "actually became physiologically calmer as he argued with his wife" (Olney, 1994, p. 12). Research evidence of these perpetrators, referred to as "vagal reactors," may clearly demonstrate the presence of different "types" of batterers and the need for differing therapeutic approaches to treatment.

If the Gottman and Jacobson research proves to be true, then the implications on the treatment interventions with violent individuals could require evaluations beyond the assessment of rigid belief systems and history of familial abuse patterns. Is there a "magic pill" in the future? Probably not, but clear justification for this direction in scholarly work may be that incidence rates could dramatically decline in the event that assessment and prediction of those individuals least likely to benefit from current treatment modalities could be more readily identified.

#### Current Domestic Violence Research

It is not without irony that the pioneer in reporting the descriptions of domestic violence perpetrators was a woman. As a matter of fact, the description of the perpetrator as seen through the words of Lenore Walker (1979), was hidden in the pages of a book whose primary

purpose was to describe "his" victim. Although this may have been indicative of the ancient and unstated right of husbands to "chastise" physically their erring spouses (Straus, 1991), the secret was finally out and the race had begun to see who could most conclusively describe the villain.

Describing domestic violence perpetrators has taken many directions over the past 15 years. And, as evidenced by the many presented theoretical perspectives, descriptive research may be for sociological awareness, psychological discrimination, or for clinical efficacy. While each chosen route for research may have been for a different purpose, collectively it can lead to what may be a better understanding of domestic violence perpetrators. The primary domains of perpetrator research can be differentiated generally as: (1) psychological descriptions, (2) social context explanations, (3) intergenerational transmission, and (4) demographic descriptions. A brief overview of each of these areas follows.

### Psychological Descriptions

One advantage to Walker's reporting her work in the 1970s was that the American Psychiatric Association had yet to remove *psychopathic personality* from the diagnostic criteria. To her credit, being able to mention that perpetrators "resembled" psychopaths seems much more

descriptive than relying on the present psychiatric appellation of antisocial. One reported similarity between the "psychopath" and the batterer, as reported by Walker (1979), was that the perpetrator seemed to have an "extraordinary ability to use charm as a manipulative technique" (p. 26). In addition, Walker reported that batterers also demonstrated: low self esteem, stereotypical attitudes toward gender roles, unpredictable reactions, severe stress reactions, pathological jealousy, and aggression acted out through sexual interaction.

Many of the observed characteristics mentioned by Walker may seem now to be common knowledge. However, there were several hypothetical questions and observations forwarded by her work that have led to a clearer understanding of the battering relationship. Among these characteristics was an apparent link between violent assault and alcohol use, unequal power dynamics in relationships, and evidence of a battering cycle. This cycle involved three distinct phases that included: "the tension building phase; the explosion or acute battering incident; and the calm, loving respite" (Walker, 1979, p. 55). Walker also noted "sexual jealousy" as being almost "universally present" in abusive relationships (1979, p. 79). These traits have been consistently found by many other social science researchers throughout the two decades that have followed Walker's primary work.

Walker's (1979) assertions that there may be some similarity between violent men and psychopaths was expanded into the notion of the *violence prone personality* in her later investigation into the dynamics of victimization (Walker, 1984). This possibility of individual pathology as an explanation for behavior was further explored by Gondolf (1988) who developed the 3 level typology that differentiated between the less severe "typical" perpetrator, and the more pathological "sociopathic" and "antisocial" batterers. Others (see Adams, 1989; Davis, 1988; Ptacek, 1988), while not specifically labeling the pathology, supported the notion that the *individual* need for domination and control resulted in violent acts.

Walker's (1979 & 1984) primary contribution to psychological explanations for battering was her articulate presentation of individual responsibility. This is clearly evidenced in her proposition of an apparent violence prone personality, and her observation that "the most violent physical abuse was suffered by women whose men were consistent drinkers" (Walker, 1979, p. 25). Both of these observations were subsequently validated when Davis (1988) noted the apparent inability of perpetrators to accept responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Nichols (1986) also found a close association between alcohol use and "violent behavior between spouses"

(p. 195).

On the side of individual pathology explanations for domestic violence, however, the 1990s have witnessed a division within the ranks. On one side, as expressed by Gondolf and Fisher (1990), there has been a softening of the firm stance within individual pathology, and movement toward the idea that substance abuse and psychological disorders may only "compound" violent behaviors, but do not adequately explain them. On the other side, a recent review of psychological dissertations shows clear evidence that the personality disorder explanation for domestic violence is alive and well (see Beasley, 1991; Hayes-Gary, 1992; Offutt, 1992; Wilcox, 1992). As noted by Wilcox (1992), there was "clinical evidence" of a wide range of diagnosable personality disorders within a sample of perpetrators involved in a counseling-based intervention program. Elevations on scales predicting personality or characterological disorders in battering men were consistently found in additional dissertations (see Beasley, 1991; Hayes-Gary, 1992; Offutt, 1989).

The movement away from the claim that the presence of diagnosable personality disorders is a cause for domestic violence has not shifted responsibility from the individual. While "pathology" may not be as often noted by the sociological community, other individual variables such as alcohol abuse, belief in traditional sex-roles, poor

communication skills, and sexual jealousy are still frequently indicated (see Crossman, Stith, & Bender, 1990; Douglas, 1991; O'Leary, 1993; Tolman & Bennett, 1990). It is important to note that while rigid, traditional sex roles have been consistently mentioned as a property of battering relationships, Boye-Beaman, Leonard, and Senchak (1993) found that "only individual gender identities proved significant for discriminating aggressive from non-aggressive couples; the gender identity configuration of the couple did not prove consequential" (p. 309). While not specifically noting individual pathology as a causal factor in battering, this finding does continue to support a view of individual characteristics as a causal factors in battering.

### Social Context Explanations

About the same time as Walker's (1979) landmark presentation, Dobash and Dobash (1979) substantiated many of her reported perpetrator characteristics, but did note that the violence in these relationships may not be "one sided." However, they were quick to point out that although women demonstrated physical aggression against their husbands, there was a "qualitative difference between the types of violence used by men and women" (p. 19). The Dobash and Dobash study also may have been one of the first empirical studies to propose the feminist

theoretical interpretation of domestic violence as an "extension of the domination and control of husbands over their wives" (1979, p. 15). This idea of thematic domination and control took Walker's concept of men being "stubbornly resistant to an equal power-sharing relationship" (1979, p. 29) to a more clinically functional level by challenging the long-standing cultural beliefs that perpetrators have held about their fundamental right to "rule" their household.

Throughout the 1980s and into the present decade, little has been done to dispute the general "look" of the perpetrator presented by Walker, and Dobash and Dobash. However, there have been many attempts at clarifications, redefinitions, refinements, differentiations, and explanations.

In the process of explanation and differentiation, Schechter (1982) began asking the relevant questions concerning "why" these violent men may only react and act out at home, and only against their wives. Schechter went on to present a compelling argument against the "pathology" of the perpetrator and, instead, posited that violent relationships (when confined to the home) were not elements of "family problems" but, instead, a function of the "power relationships" that existed *within* the family (p. 215). Schechter's explanation that utilizing violence as a "tool that enforces husbands' authority over wives" (1982, p.

219), placed domestic violence in the wider context of patriarchal society. Schechter noted that "men are not necessarily consciously aware of their need to dominate. Rather, they are socialized to feel uncomfortable when not in control, and they turn to violence as a response to their discomfort" (1982, p. 219). Thus, Schechter was an early spokesperson suggesting violence as occurring in a context of a reaction to discomfort. This perspective has since been extended by Gottman (1994) and Rubin (1983).

Early investigations into "why men batter" can tentatively be divided into two categories. The first, similar to the approach posited by Walker (1979 & 1984), suggested individual pathology with a need to control and dominate a partner. The second approach, corresponding to the Dobash and Dobash (1979), and Schechter (1982) work, proposed societal conditioning creating an informal "norm" or conditioned response to discomfort, that results in acceptance of violent acts within the family setting.

Throughout the 1980s and into the present decade, these two passageways to explanations for violence have been well traveled. Carlson (1984) attempted to apply the complicated Brofenbrenner Ecological Model of human development to violent relationships. Nichols (1986) took a simpler route and noted that "as a society, the United States generally condones the idea of violence as a means of achieving desired ends" (p. 191). Nichols asserted that

"family violence emerges from the nature and functioning of the family itself and from the nature of society in which it is located, rather than from individual causes" (1986, p. 190). Dutton (1988) further encouraged movement away from "individual causes" of violence by asserting that "sociological explanations for wife assault...endeavored to correct the impression created by psychiatric explanations that wife assault was a rare event that was committed only by men with diagnosable psychiatric disturbances" (p. 15). Dutton went on to note that wife assault is "a common event generated by social rules that [supports] male dominance of women and tacit approval by society" (1988, p. 16). Waldo (1987) echoed this sentiment in noting that "society's response to men who batter has historically been to condone, ignore, or conceal their behavior" (p. 385). It was Waldo's contention that although specific acts of violence may be learned from the family of origin, it is society's indifference that undergirds continuance of this learned behavior (Waldo, 1987).

When noting society's ills as the primary causal factor in domestic violence, it is not surprising to find Murray Straus at the forefront. Consistently a strong proponent of an exchange theory notion of violence, Straus (1991) has said that "as long as the general public and legislators perceive family violence as a problem of a few 'sick' persons...the financial support for the effort needed to end

family violence will be inadequate" (p. 17). Straus goes on to note that "informal social norms have changed much less than the law has. Almost a third of American men and a quarter of American women perceive that it is normal for a husband or wife to slap the other 'on occasion'" (1991, p. 27).

### Intergenerational Transmission

Often cited from the early work of Walker (1979) is her presentation of the *cycle of violence*. Even though this observation has guided many researchers and clinicians toward effective intervention practices directed at "breaking the cycle," recent domestic violence intervention programs have directed their attention toward another of Walker's "feelings" that may prove even more beneficial in the arena of clinical treatment. As noted by Walker, "if the psychosocial-learning theory of violent behavior is accurate, then batterers can be taught to relearn their aggressive responses" (1979, p. 28). It is current thought, in most domestic violence intervention programs, that there are groups of batterers who can benefit from cognitive-behavioral counseling strategies based partly on psychosocial-learning theory (NCJFCJ, 1992). As previously indicated, a social learning perspective "views biological factors, observational learning, and reinforced performance as the main origins of aggressive behavior" (Dutton, 1988,

p. 44).

The intergenerational transmission perspective posits that learning is a product primarily of the perpetrator's family-of-origin. Caesar (1988), while noting that "there is little we know, from a qualitative perspective, about the [perpetrators'] perceptions of abuse in their families-of-origin" (p. 50), suggested that violent adult behaviors were the direct result of loyalties and alliances toward, or separation from either the abusive father or victimized mother. This was also the direction taken by Davis (1988) who believed that "it is evident that violent behavior is transmitted intergenerationally" (p. 293), but uses this notion to forge a bridge between individual pathologies and societal conditioning. It was Davis' (1988) contention that there are "norms that legitimize and glorify violence in society and family" (p. 292). Gelles and Straus (1988), while strongly proposing a social exchange perspective, stated that "people hit family members because they can" (p. 22). This perpetrator attitude stems from a learned behavior from the family-of-origin, and translates into learned indifference to family violence due to a combination of social indifference with little likelihood of punishment (Gelles & Straus, 1988).

### Demographic Descriptions

In the decade of the 1980s, family researchers did much to advance the study and understanding of domestic violence. There were, however, few studies specifically related to perpetrator demographic characteristics. In the Pirog-Good and Stets-Kealey (1985) review of battering programs, the descriptive characteristics of the perpetrator were reported as: a caucasian male, about 34 years old, married approximately 6 years to the identified victim, with a high school educational level. In addition, Hamberger and Hastings (1986) findings indicated perpetrators were primarily employed in blue-collar jobs and were either Protestant or Catholic. Nichols (1986) reiterated Walker's (1979) warning that alcohol may have a close association with "violent behavior between spouses" (Nichols, 1986, p. 195).

In the Yllo and Straus (1981) study comparing the rate of violence between married and cohabiting couples, it was reported that cohabiting couples had a higher rate of violence. While it has been recognized that the additional stresses of living on low income may contribute to abusive behaviors, Yllo and Straus found that the "the stresses of living on low income are somehow compounded for couples living together unmarried" (1981, p. 344). In addition, they found that "the rates of wife beating and total couple violence are considerably greater for those under 30 [years

of age]" (p. 344).

Most perpetrator demographic information is found within "risk factor" lists that are included as part of research focused primarily in another direction (see Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979). These lists usually include:

1. The husband is unemployed or underemployed.
2. The family income is below the poverty level.
3. There are two or more children in the household.
4. The couple has been married less than ten years.
5. The husband and wife are under 30 years of age.
6. The family is from a minority racial group (Pirog-Good & Stets-Kealey, 1985, conflict with this finding).
7. Both husband and wife are verbally aggressive.
8. Both husband and wife abuse alcohol.
9. The couple has lived in their neighborhood less than two years.
10. The wife is a full-time housewife.

### Conclusion

One of the most consistent themes that surfaced in the 1980s echoed the Straus' (1991) conclusion that social indifference was a primary factor in the maintenance of domestic violence (see Avis, 1992; Davis & Hagen, 1992; Kaufman, 1992; Rosen & Stith, 1993). But this consistency does not mean that the controversy surrounding causes of

violence is fading. In the 1993 Current Controversies on Family Violence, it is clear that 15 years of study have entrenched proponents of the various perspectives into loudly proclaiming that their particular view is the correct one. And while there may be merit in all of the arguments, the most misleading aspect of the text may be that the controversies are "current." It can be argued that the O'Leary (1993) claim that severe forms of violence may be more pathological than "typical" violence is analogous to the Gondolf (1988) typology that suggested the very same thing. Gelles' (1993) "sociological lens" pointing to life-span development, human development, social factors, and the family life cycle, is reminiscent of the Nichols (1986) assertion that the "nature and functioning of the family itself" (p. 190) can be both indicative of an intimate environment or a violent one. The Yllo (1993) assertion that "feminist theory is not a narrow theory of one aspect of family violence. It is a very broad analysis of gender and power in society that has been fruitfully applied to domestic violence" (p. 49) is correct. Dobash and Dobash began that line of reasoning in 1979 and it has consistently continued. The Kurz (1993) argument that violence in intimate relationships is not gender neutral with men being the primary perpetrator was the general contention of Walker (1979 & 1984) and continued recently with Avis (1992). And finally, Flanzer (1993) and Gelles (1993) agreed that

alcohol abuse was related to violent acts (although Flanzer takes a much stronger stance). Such a perspective has been consistently stated since Walker (1979) noted that "the most violent physical abuse was suffered by women whose men were consistent drinkers" (p. 25).

All of the arguments, agreements, variances, and consistencies in the domestic violence literature may not point to a *single* truth in discovering the accurate characteristics and components surrounding domestic violence. Instead, the literature may accurately direct us toward the complexity of a multi-faceted problem. As reported by Avis (1992), "during the Vietnam War, from 1967-1973, the U.S. lost 39,000 soldiers. During the same 6-year period, almost half that number - 17,500 - of American women and children were killed by family members" (p. 228).

The issues surrounding domestic violence are not easily isolated, identified, and contained. There have been many continuing themes in the study of domestic violence over the past 15 years. Perhaps one of the most important was the recently reiterated call by Straus (1993) for both more comprehensive community representative and clinical/criminal perpetrator samples in order to "provide a realistic basis for programs designed to aid the victims and to end the most serious type of domestic violence" (pp. 77-78). He noted the inappropriate generalizations often made from data from one population to the other and emphasized the need for both

types of samples.

This review has indicated that the study of the dynamics of domestic violence is still in its infancy. However, much has been done to clarify the presentation of the perpetrator through the development and application of theoretical explanations and empirical descriptions. We have traveled far and we have a long way to go. While there have been many studies searching for the "warning signs" for abusive behaviors, little help has been offered to clinicians delivering intervention programs in the way of clear presentation of socio-demographic profiles. And while we might have some ideas concerning the attitudes and beliefs of the batterer, perpetrator perceptions of family-or-origin abuse, perceptions of male "role," and attributes assigned to partner behaviors are sadly lacking. As noted by Straus (1993), comprehensive data is still needed. The intention of this study was to contribute to the compilation of just such a cumulative research effort.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The general objective of this study was to present a relatively comprehensive depiction of the male court-referred perpetrator of partner abuse. This was accomplished through: (1) a case record based profile drawn from a clinical sample of court-referred perpetrators, and (2) individual interviews with a smaller sample of court-referred perpetrators. Due to the dual nature of the present study, the specific components of this section will indicate differentiation by noting either: (1) record profile, or (2) interviews.

#### Selection of the Sample

Data for a record profile descriptive analysis was collected from clinical records and police reports of men who had been arrested for either domestic violence assault or domestic violence harassment, and court referred to the Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP) for perpetrators of domestic violence at the Family Counseling Service (FCS) of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Agency records available for review were from all identified perpetrators referred to FCS between December, 1990 and March, 1993. Perpetrators included in this population were:

1. Involved in male-to-female intimate relationship violence.
2. Referred by one of the participating courts in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama to Family Counseling Service for DVIP screening between December, 1990 and March, 1993.
3. Completed with the screening process by March, 1993.
4. Plead guilty to Domestic Violence Assault, or Domestic Violence Harassment with the condition that sentencing be postponed until DVIP disposition.
5. Confirmed as an appropriate referral by a DVIP intake counselor.
6. Completed with their final case disposition by March, 1993.

Two-hundred and ninety-four perpetrators met the above criteria. Of those, 286 (97%) case records contained adequate information for coding. Individual characteristics of the perpetrator, the perpetrators' family history, program participation, type of violence, and arrest report were coded from the existing clinical screening intake form. Individual identifying characteristics of the perpetrators (i.e. name, address, phone number) were neither coded nor maintained in research data in any manner. This aspect of utilizing case record data is crucial for compliance with human subjects guidelines by social scientists using agency

records as a data source.

The sample for in-depth, qualitative study of domestic violence perpetrators were drawn from individual interviews with ten perpetrators referred to Family Counseling Service of Tuscaloosa, Alabama between March, 1993 and May, 1994. Perpetrators included in the interview sample met all of the above criteria except they completed the screening process and their final case disposition was by May, 1994. In addition, they indicated through completed FCS research release forms a willingness to participate in interview procedures.

Approximately 75 perpetrators met the above criteria. Due to the nature of the population this study sought to examine, it was impractical to expect that a representative sample of male court-referred perpetrators could be chosen through random measures. For that reason, a sample of convenience was chosen from those perpetrators willing to participate. Consistent with the previously mentioned human subjects guidelines, individual identifying characteristics of the respondents were neither coded nor maintained in research data in any manner.

Due to the in-depth nature of qualitative interviewing this study sought and collected information from ten respondents. Generalizations to other populations of court-referred perpetrators was maximized through use of additional qualitative sampling procedures to maximize range

within the panel of informants. As indicated by Weiss (1993), a small sample that is chosen purposively to maximize range would be indicative of the dissimilarities that are present in the larger population.

Generalizing to a larger population with a maximum range sample of convenience required choosing a sample while noting specific elements of the larger population. These elements included:

1. contrast in significant independent variables,
2. contrast in significant dependent variables,
3. contrast in context, and
4. contrast in dynamics (Weiss, 1993).

Analysis of the clinical records suggested that significant variables for sample selection included:

1. level of violence,
2. perpetrator age,
3. perpetrator occupation,
4. perpetrator employment history, and
5. time perpetrator and victim have been together or married.

Consistent with the record analysis of the FCS perpetrator population, this maximum range sample of convenience included ten respondents who met the following criteria:

1. The sample was evenly divided by level of violence. Half of the respondents had demonstrated a potentially life threatening level of level of violence and the remaining half had not.
2. Ninety percent (9 of 10) of the respondents were 40 years of age or younger.
3. Sixty percent (6 of 10) of the respondents were classified as "skilled laborers." Twenty percent (2 of 10) were classified as "unemployed or employment not known." The remaining 2 respondents were classified as unskilled labor.
4. Seventy percent of the respondents (7 or 10) were classified as having a "stable" work history. The remaining 3 respondents were classified as having an unstable work history.
5. All of the sample had at one time identified themselves and the victim as sharing a household. Even so, record analysis indicated that 40% of the perpetrators were not married to the identified victim at the time of the arrest. This proportion (4 of 10) was reflected in the interview sample.

## Procedures

### Data Collection (record profile)

The participating agency provided access to perpetrator case records, intake screening forms, and perpetrator arrest reports. Limitations to variables coded were reflective of the information that was needed and obtained by the participating agency. Each case record included a narrative report of the perpetrator's initial presentation to the agency as well as the clinician's perceptions of the perpetrator's appropriateness for group treatment. Data collection involved reading the narrative reports, arresting reports, and intake forms. Information was coded in 43 separate demographic variables.

### Data Collection (interviews)

Possible interview respondents were contacted from a prepared list, compiled by the participating agency, of those perpetrators who had indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Descriptive data from each of the possible respondents were made available to the researcher by the agency in order to insure a sample chosen to maximize range. All interviews were held in the physical facilities of the participating agency.

Consistent with accepted methods of qualitative research (see Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992; Straus & Corbin,

1990; Weiss, 1993), the present study gathered data in the style of the development of "grounded theory" (Straus, 1987) utilizing open-ended questions for the process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing [the interview] data" (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). As indicated by Weiss (1993), effective qualitative data collection should allow for:

1. detailed descriptions of the respondent group,
2. integration of multiple perspectives,
3. clear descriptions of the process,
4. development of holistic descriptions,
5. evaluation of events,
6. bridging intersubjectivities, and
7. the identification of variables and the framing of hypotheses for future quantitative research.

Based on the various issues discussed in the review of the literature, it was believed that the central guiding focus of the study (a comprehensive "picture" of the perpetrator) would best be examined through a substantive frame involving:

1. relationship issues,
2. parenting issues,
3. issues surrounding gender-identity and gender-role,
4. issues of conflict resolution, and
5. cultural beliefs.

Content areas for interview questions included, but were not limited to:

1. What was the perpetrator's perception of a good father?
2. What was the perpetrator's perception of a good husband?
3. Did the perpetrator's partner (victim) seem similar/different than the perpetrator's mother?
4. What was the nature of the relationship the perpetrator had with his father and mother?
5. What was the perpetrator's perception of being a man?
6. How did the perpetrator learn to become a man?
7. How would the perpetrator teach his son to be a man?
8. What was perpetrator's perception of being an appropriate woman?
9. How would the perpetrator teach his daughter to be a woman?
10. Was the perpetrator aware of the law against domestic violence assault/harassment?
11. What was the perpetrator's perception of the penalty versus the crime?
12. Was the group process helpful? Why or why not?
13. How was the arresting event similar to previous events?
14. What should women/men know?

### Data Analysis (record profile)

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is the computer program that was used for all case record analyses. In order to test the associations between the variables relevant to the study objectives, frequency distributions, chi-square analyses, and t-test procedures were used.

### Data Analysis (interviews)

Data from the interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory methods of open, axial, and selective coding. As recommended by Weiss (1993), as interviews were completed they were transcribed, read, and analyzed in order to identify the underlying themes in the perpetrators' responses. In order to obtain clarity and depth of the identified themes, as each interview was read and coded, subsequent interview questions were adjusted to reflect the similarities of concepts that had been previously identified.

The underlying contextual themes and the concepts that emerged as components of those themes were identified by the author and an additional reader, who shared their perceptions of the perpetrators' responses. Consistent with the methods of a grounded theory approach, contextual themes were identified as the recurring characteristics within the perpetrators' descriptions of their life histories. The

identified themes and concepts were the result of consistent agreement within the pooled perceptions of the readers.

### Limitations of the Study

It is important to recognize that there are probably several "types" of perpetrators of domestic violence. The generalizability of this study is severely limited to heterosexual male court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse who are participating in a comprehensive domestic violence intervention program. In addition, the qualitative analyses of this study is limited in generalizability to those perpetrators who were able to complete such an intervention.

### Sampling Limitations

The qualitative portion of this study was limited to a convenience sample of maximum range due to inaccessibility to many of the perpetrators. Perpetrators adjudicated to the participating intervention program were all asked to sign a voluntary consent for research prior to intervention participation. Those perpetrators that were willing to follow through with the interviews had all successfully completed the program and may represent only a select group within that population.

### Methodological Limitations

The quantitative analyses of this study were limited to those variables that could be adequately coded from the existing agency screening form. This limitation required primarily a categorical level of measurement.

It should be reiterated that all of the respondents for this study had been adjudicated to a treatment intervention for domestic violence assault or harassment violations. Due to this component of the study, the potential does exist for some manipulateness of positive assessments of program effects by the respondents.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Quantitative Results

Previously reported demographic risk factors associated with domestic violence perpetrators have included low income, unemployment, less than a high school education, excessive alcohol and drug use, divorced or multiple marriages, if married - the duration has been less than 10 years, and age under 30 (Benokraitis, 1993; Eshleman, 1994; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979). Also noted in the review of the literature as risk factors for domestic violence were the number of children in the household, number of years in the current neighborhood, and the wife as full-time housewife (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

Frequency distributions for this study indicated that for the sample in the present study, the mean perpetrator age was 31 years with the median being 30 and the reported range 18-58 years. Data on perpetrator income was inconsistently reported. Initially, the program screening form was left for the incoming perpetrator to complete. Upon review of the early forms, many of the perpetrators, while noting employment, chose not to report income in dollar amounts. With over 50% of the perpetrator

income data missing, it was decided that this variable would have to be excluded and it was not analyzed.

Perpetrators referred to the program did complete information on employment "type." For classification purposes the participating agency divided employment type into five mutually exclusive categories. These were:

1. Self Employed: Defined as regular, uninterrupted employment in a single business or occupation owned by the perpetrator.
2. Skilled Laborer: Defined as a blue-collar job requiring a period of training or apprenticeship similar to the technical training associated with junior college programs.
3. Professional: Defined as white-collar employment requiring a period of training or apprenticeship comparable with a 4-year college degree.
4. Unskilled Laborer: Defined as blue-collar employment not requiring any special period of training or apprenticeship.
5. None or Not Known.

In addition to employment type, work history was noted by the clinical intake counselor and assigned one of 4 mutually exclusive categories. These were:

1. Stable history: Defined as uninterrupted employment with a single employer for a period of time not less than one year.
2. Unstable history: Defined as employment with serial employers or periods of unemployment for a period of time not less than one month, at the discrepancy of the perpetrator or employer.
3. Cyclical Unemployment: Defined as uninterrupted employment with a single employer for a period of time not less than one year, but with periods of unemployment due to seasonal conditions or circumstances left to the discrepancy of the employer.
4. Not Known.

Sixty-one percent of the perpetrators indicated "skilled labor" and 20% reported "unskilled labor" as their primary occupation. Sixty-nine percent of the population studied had a "stable" work history. Nineteen percent reported an "unstable" work history with the remaining perpetrators (12%) categorized as employment "not known."

Thirty-six percent of the sample studied reported an educational level that was less than a high school diploma. Consistent with previous research with perpetrators (see Caesar, 1988; Davis, 1988), less than 1% of the sample had achieved an education level beyond a 4-year college degree. The average educational level for the sample was a high

school diploma (45%), with 18% reporting education beyond the twelfth grade.

It has been noted that the participating law enforcement agencies would classify suspects as involved with a domestic violence arrest when the assault or harassment involved present or former household members (TPD, 1990). In this regard, 78% of the perpetrators in the sample studied reported sharing a residence with the victim at the time of the arrest, and 58% of the sample reported being married. Of those reporting to be married, 29% reported marriages under 5 years in duration and 49% reported being married 10 years or less. Of the perpetrators reporting being previously married or divorced, 5% reported 2 marriages and 2% reported more than 2 marriages.

Many descriptions of men who batter include excessive use of alcohol or the abuse of alcohol under stress (see Walker, 1979). In the population studied, 56% reported or were described in the police report as using alcohol at the time of the incident precipitating arrest.

Additional variables regarding characteristics of the sample studied indicated the predominate ethnic origin to be African American (65%). There was an average of 4 siblings with 46% of the sample reporting a middle sibling position. Sixty-three percent of the perpetrators reported the presence of 1 or more children in the household, with a

mean of 2. The average age of the child(ren) in the household was 7 years. Fifty-two percent of the perpetrators reported 1 or more of their biological child(ren) were present in the household.

### Level of Violence

Acts of assault and harassment were identified both from the arrest report and the self-report of the perpetrators' behavior as noted during the initial clinical screening interview. The initial categories for violent acts ranged from verbal or other non-physical abuse (i.e. yelling, spitting, and throwing objects), to injurious and potentially life threatening physical violence that either included the sustained and repeated use of violence or the use of a weapon (i.e. choking, hitting with fist, stabbing with knife, and shoot at with gun).

Of the 286 perpetrator case records that were coded, 62 separate combinations of violent acts were noted (i.e. hit with fist; slap, hit, throw object; hit with fist, slap; etc.). Due to the great variation of violent behaviors, levels of violence were initially categorized into five types. The criteria for the development of the five categories of violence were drawn primarily from the violent acts indicated on arrest report, the self-report of the perpetrators' behavior during the initial screening interview, and previous research by Gondolf (1988) in the

area of batterer typologies. The categories were: verbal abuse only, two levels of non life threatening physical violence, and two levels of potentially life threatening physical violence.

Based on exploring between group comparisons involving different types, levels, and combinations of demonstrated violent acts, it appeared that the initial levels of violence were not clearly differentiated and it was decided that the categories of violence should be collapsed into two only levels. The differentiating factor between the two types of violence was the demonstration of a potentially life threatening level of violence as indicated by police reports of visible injury and, in some cases, the hospitalization of the victim. Evaluation of the clinical intake screening procedures suggested that what Gondolf referred to as "antisocial" or "sociopathic" tendencies (see Gondolf, 1988) would disqualify the perpetrator for the DVIP treatment intervention. Grounds for being denied entrance into the treatment program included being diagnosed with personality disorders, excessive drug dependence, criminal activity unrelated to domestic violence, denying personal responsibility for the violent act, and threatening the intake counselor. Because the presence of these "antisocial" characteristics eliminated perpetrators from the treatment intervention, the two categorized levels of violence most closely resemble sub-groupings of the Gondolf

Type III, "typical batterer" who used "less severe verbal and physical abuse than [the sociopathic and antisocial batterer]" (1988, p. 197). Even while noting that the most extreme levels of violence (i.e. murder, rape, multiple arrests) would disqualify a perpetrator from clinical intervention, it was interesting that 57% of the perpetrators accepted for the DVIP intervention had used a potentially life threatening level of violence. While this may be indicative of the level of violence that must be experienced or witnessed before there is police intervention, it is important to note that of the perpetrators who were unsuccessful in completing the treatment regimen, 74% had used a potentially life threatening level of violence. It should also be noted that 8% of the victims (of the entire sample) required hospitalization. While it can be said that, for the majority of women, police intervention took place before the violence escalated to a level of attempted murder, the level of violence necessary to require hospitalization does appear to be more prevalent among those men who did not complete program requirements.

#### Between Group Comparisons of Completers v. Non-Completers

A stated objective for this study was to formulate a socio-demographic profile of court-referred perpetrators in order to obtain a clearer picture of those perpetrators who

might best be served by clinical interventions. To this end, in addition to the observations provided by descriptive statistics, between group comparisons regarding those perpetrators who were successful in completing group requirements versus those who were unsuccessful were examined through the construction of crosstabulation frequency tables, chi-square analyses, and t-tests.

It is important to note that the participating intervention program is the treatment component of a comprehensive interagency effort to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. All of the perpetrators who are involved in the program have been ordered by the court to participate. For this reason, the participating agency makes every effort to reduce the incidence of non-completion. This includes fee reductions and possible delays in evaluating the perpetrators' involvement due to out of town employment or medical complications.

The intervention program involves a 12 week educational curriculum that requires the perpetrators to participate in weekly group sessions. In some cases, an alcohol and drug component is additionally required. This is usually accomplished through monitored Alcoholics Anonymous participation. Of the case records reviewed, nearly 80% of the perpetrators (n=225) completed the program requirements. Of the 58 perpetrators that did not complete, only one case was due to medical complications unrelated to domestic

violence. The majority of perpetrators that did not complete (n=34) refused to attend group sessions. Twelve perpetrators refused to attend AA meetings, 8 were arrested for additional domestic violence assault violations, 2 refused psychological testing, and 1 perpetrator did not complete due to non-payment. All of these perpetrators were referred back to the court for final case disposition.

In the present study, data analysis was reliant on levels of measurement that were available from the existing in-take screening form that was provided by the participating agency. On that form, most data were recorded in a categorical fashion. Perpetrator age, the number of children in the household, years married to the victim, and highest educational grade completed were recorded using interval data and thus were examined by t-tests. For these variables, there were no significant differences in means when comparing completers versus non-completers.

Pirog-Good and Stets-Kealey (1985) reported anecdotal information that suggested clear differentiation of characteristics of those perpetrators who were "successful" in treatment versus those that were not (success being defined as the ability to complete program requirements). Their survey of 59 treatment programs for batterers examined completion rates, counselor credentials, program strategies, attrition rates, referral sources, screening requirements, and client characteristics. Completers versus non-

completers differentiating factors in this study included age of the perpetrator, educational level, and number of years married (to victim). In the present study, age, education, and years married did not prove to differentiate program completers from non-completers. Differentiating factors for perpetrator program completion in the present study were: the perpetrators' use of alcohol at time of arrest, employment history, level of violence, and whether or not the victim was hospitalized as the result of the assault. These factors are discussed individually.

#### Use of Alcohol

It has been about fifteen years since Walker (1979) reported that the "most violent physical abuse [is] suffered by women whose men were consistent drinkers" (p. 25). This observation has held consistently true through subsequent studies of batterers (see Gondolf, 1988), risk factor analyses (see Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980), and comparative analyses between those men involved in alcohol treatment settings verses spouse abuse treatment settings (see Crossman, Stith, and Bender, 1990). A recent study of family violence programs serving court-referred perpetrators offered further evidence that the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs should be considered a major factor in treating such a clientele (NCJFCJ, 1992). According to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (1992), those

programs that exhibited the greatest efficacy in the treatment of domestic violence perpetrators acknowledged that continuing abuse of alcohol and drugs inhibited program success. In addition, Flanzer (1993) has reported that alcohol as a causal agent in domestic violence may be viewed as an instigator, a disinhibitor of social control, an agent for rationalization, as well as others effects. Tolman and Bennett (1990) have also noted that up to 50% "of battering incidents involved alcohol in some manner" (p. 89).

In the present study there was a significant association ( $p > .05$ ) between the use of alcohol at the time of arrest and program completion status (see Table 4.1). Of the 58 perpetrators who did not complete the program, 69% were drinking at the time of arrest. Of the perpetrators who did complete the program ( $n=228$ ), 53% were drinking at the time of arrest.

Additional examination of the relationship between drinking at arrest and the level of aggression in the present sample (see Table 4.2), approached a significant association ( $p = .06$ ). It is interesting to note that the highest total percentage was with those that were drinking and exhibiting a potentially life threatening level of violence (35%). Even though a significant association was not noted, the fact that over 56% of the sample were drinking at the time of arrest does seem to indicate that while there are additional variables that influence the

Table 4.1: Perpetrator drinking at the time of arrest by perpetrator program completion status

| Count<br>Row percent<br>Col percent<br>Tot percent | Yes<br>Completed            | No<br>Completed            | Row<br>Total |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Yes<br/>Drinking</b>                            | 121<br>75.2<br>53.1<br>42.3 | 40<br>24.8<br>69.0<br>14.0 | 161<br>56.3  |
| <b>No<br/>Drinking</b>                             | 107<br>85.6<br>46.9<br>37.4 | 18<br>14.4<br>31.0<br>6.3  | 125<br>43.7  |
| <b>Column<br/>Total</b>                            | 228<br>79.7                 | 58<br>20.3                 | 286<br>100.0 |

| Chi-Square | Value | DF | Sig. |
|------------|-------|----|------|
| Pearson    | 4.74  | 1  | .02  |
| Statistic  | Value |    | Sig. |
| Cramer's V | .128  |    | .02  |

Table 4.2: Perpetrator drinking at the time of arrest by perpetrator level of violence

| Count<br>Row percent<br>Col percent<br>Tot percent | Level<br>One               | Level<br>Two               | Row<br>Total |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Yes<br/>Drinking</b>                            | 62<br>38.8<br>50.4<br>21.9 | 98<br>61.3<br>61.3<br>34.6 | 160<br>56.5  |
| <b>No<br/>Drinking</b>                             | 61<br>49.6<br>49.6<br>21.6 | 62<br>50.4<br>38.8<br>21.9 | 123<br>43.5  |
| <b>Column<br/>Total</b>                            | 123<br>43.5                | 160<br>56.5                | 283<br>100.0 |

| Chi-Square | Value | DF | Sig. |
|------------|-------|----|------|
| Pearson    | 3.32  | 1  | .06  |
| Statistic  | Value |    | Sig. |
| Cramer's V | .108  |    | .06  |

violent behavior of perpetrators, alcohol use was a factor.

### Employment History

In the present study, one of the most significant differences ( $p > .001$ ) between perpetrator program completers and non-completers was employment history (see Table 4.3). For the entire sample ( $n=286$ ), the single highest percentage was for those perpetrators with a stable work history and program completion (61%). For those perpetrators who successfully completed the intervention program requirements ( $n=228$ ), 76% reported a stable work history and only 13% reported unstable employment. Of those perpetrators who did not complete the program requirements ( $n=58$ ), 41% reported a stable work history and 45% reported an unstable work history. While this association may be indicative of men who are most able to remain and complete any number of tasks, no previous literature on perpetrator interventions were located to indicate that this aspect of perpetrator history was relevant.

In descriptive studies of domestic violence perpetrator characteristics, it has been noted that perpetrators are "most likely" to be employed in blue collar jobs (see Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Hamberger and Hastings, 1986; Walker, 1979). In the present study, this held true with 81% of the perpetrators being either skilled or unskilled laborers. Even so, there were no significant

Table 4.3: Perpetrator employment history by perpetrator program completion status

| Count<br>Row percent<br>Col percent<br>Tot percent | Yes<br>Completed            | No<br>Completed           | Row<br>Total |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Stable<br/>History</b>                          | 174<br>87.9<br>76.3<br>60.8 | 24<br>12.1<br>41.4<br>8.4 | 198<br>69.2  |
| <b>Unstable<br/>History</b>                        | 29<br>52.7<br>12.7<br>10.1  | 26<br>47.3<br>44.8<br>9.1 | 55<br>19.2   |
| <b>Unemployed<br/>or<br/>Not Known</b>             | 25<br>75.7<br>10.9<br>8.7   | 8<br>24.2<br>13.8<br>2.8  | 33<br>11.5   |
| <b>Column<br/>Total</b>                            | 228<br>79.7                 | 58<br>20.3                | 286<br>100.0 |

| Chi-Square | Value | DF | Sig. |
|------------|-------|----|------|
| Pearson    | 34.91 | 3  | .000 |
| Statistic  | Value |    | Sig. |
| Cramer's V | .349  |    | .000 |

associations between the types of employment and the perpetrators' final program completion status. It is also difficult to ascertain the likelihood of law enforcement agencies to arrest professional "white collar" perpetrators given the discrepancies between reports of general population domestic violence (see Straus, 1991 and 1993) and the preponderance of working class arrests. As noted by Straus and Gelles (1986), it may be predicted that "at least one violent incident [has] occurred" in 28% of American families (p. 466). But as further reported by Straus (1993) in all but the most vigilant communities, domestic violence report and arrest would require that the victim need medical attention. Even so, the significant association between work history and not the type of employment may prove beneficial in the continuing development and refinement of effective intervention strategies.

#### Level of Violence

It has been noted that in the sample studied, the level of violence necessary to require the victim to be hospitalized appeared to be indicative of those perpetrators who did not complete the intervention program requirements. Significant associations were found between completion status and both the level of violence ( $p > .01$ ), and victim hospitalization ( $p > .05$ ).

The level of violence used by the perpetrator in the incident which lead to the arresting assault differed in the use of a potentially life threatening act or acts. Of the 58 perpetrators who did not complete the program requirements (see Table 4.4), 74% used a potentially life threatening level of violence against his victim. Of perpetrators who did complete the program, 52% used a potentially life threatening level of violence. It also was noted that of the perpetrators that used a non life threatening level of violence (n=123), 88% completed the program compared to only 12% that did not.

Of the total sample studied (n=286), 8% (n=24) of the perpetrators' victims received an injury that required hospitalization (see Table 4.5). It should be noted that when examining the number of perpetrators who successfully completed the program (n=228), only 7% of the victims were hospitalized compared to 16% of the victims of those perpetrators (n=58) that did not complete.

### Qualitative Results

Ten perpetrators who had completed the participating intervention program were interviewed for qualitative analyses. In addition to having met the criteria outlined in the methods chapter, several other distinguishing characteristics were noted. All of the respondents indicated that their mothers were their primary caregiver

Table 4.4: Perpetrator level of violence by perpetrator program completion status

| Count<br>Row percent<br>Col percent<br>Tot percent | Yes<br>Completed            | No<br>Completed            | Row<br>Total |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Level<br>One                                       | 108<br>87.8<br>48.0<br>38.2 | 15<br>12.2<br>25.9<br>5.3  | 123<br>43.5  |
| Level<br>Two                                       | 117<br>73.1<br>52.0<br>41.3 | 43<br>26.9<br>74.1<br>15.2 | 160<br>56.5  |
| Column<br>Total                                    | 225<br>79.5                 | 58<br>20.5                 | 283<br>100.0 |

| Chi-Square | Value | DF | Sig. |
|------------|-------|----|------|
| Pearson    | 9.19  | 1  | .002 |
| Statistic  | Value |    | Sig. |
| Cramer's V | .180  |    | .002 |

Table 4.5: Perpetrators' victim hospitalized by perpetrator program completion status

| Count<br>Row percent<br>Col percent<br>Tot percent | Yes<br>Completed            | No<br>Completed            | Row<br>Total |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Victim<br>Hospitalized                             | 15<br>62.5<br>6.6<br>5.2    | 9<br>37.5<br>15.5<br>3.1   | 24<br>8.4    |
| Victim not<br>Hospitalized                         | 213<br>81.3<br>93.4<br>74.5 | 49<br>18.7<br>84.5<br>17.1 | 262<br>91.6  |
| Column<br>Total                                    | 228<br>79.7                 | 58<br>20.3                 | 286<br>100.0 |

| Chi-Square | Value | DF | Sig. |
|------------|-------|----|------|
| Pearson    | 4.80  | 1  | .02  |
| Statistic  | Value |    | Sig. |
| Cramer's V | .129  |    | .02  |

during their childhood. Nine of the ten respondents indicated that their natural fathers were not present in the home, four having left due to divorce, two by desertion, and three by death. Nine of the respondents reported that their mothers worked outside of the home. All of the respondents reported that they were currently in an intimate relationship, with nine of the respondents indicating that they were still sharing a residence with the identified victim.

In the present study of court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse, as well as previous studies, quantitative analyses have revealed that alcohol use, employment history, level or type of violence, and the degree of injury to the victim may all play a significant role in describing perpetrators who are more likely to complete an intervention program. But investigation of these variables have not included a description of the perpetrators' own perceptions of themselves and aspects of their lives. Who are the perpetrators? Beyond the demographics of family income, years married, and other descriptive variables, it is the answer to this question that may further direct clinicians to interventions that allow for even greater efficacy toward the goal of changing violent behaviors.

The results of the interviews conducted for this study suggested that court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse demonstrated a constricted range of emotional and behavioral

responses. This is evidenced by their own descriptions of personal histories that share remarkable similarities, including the physical and emotional absence of a father figure, an overwhelmed mother, a deficiency of communication and language skills, and the presence of both idealized and traditional gender role attitudes.

When the respondents' were asked what they thought they might have missed while growing up, absence of the father in their families of origin was consistently mentioned by all respondents through emphatic statements like the following:

I didn't have no father.

I missed having my true father there. If I could do it different, I'd like to have him around.

My father was never around.

The respondents' view of their mother's role and responsibility in the family also was a repeated theme throughout the interviews. Most often, this was expressed through statements referring to their mothers' never ending reality of taking up the slack because of a missing parent:

My mother, she was my mother and my father growing up.

She took care of things. She was a hard working momma.

My mom did everything.

As a result, many of the respondents also described their mothers as often unavailable to them due to overwhelming responsibilities both in and outside of the home.

The lack of adequate communication skills was described in a variety of ways. A recurring theme was that through their intervention program involvement, communication skills were enhanced:

You know, [I now know that] if you feel like getting into an argument too deep, just get away from it for a little while and spend some time by yourself and then come back and try to talk the problem over.

I guess now it's more like when we really start to get into something, it's like I can begin to talk it out and stuff.

I did learn a lot of stuff, like communicating, that I really didn't know.

When asked about their program involvement, all of the respondents mentioned some form of enhanced communication skill as being one of the most beneficial outcomes.

Whereas most of the respondents reported being from a single parent or a step-family environment, all expressed strong sentiments toward what is generally referred to as an idealized and traditional model of familial roles for men and women:

Women are supposed to be able to take care of things in the house and men are supposed to take care of the family. That's just the way that things are supposed to be.

I guess the image is that guys are supposed to be strong and girls are supposed to be nice and sweet.

[A father should be] taking care of the family. Being someone you can look up too, you know, being a role model. [And a mother should] cook, clean, and be able to keep a good house.

None of the respondents indicated that such was the case in their own family of origin.

An absent father, an overwhelmed mother, communication deficits, and traditional and idealized gender roles were the most frequently expressed themes. There were several concepts that were reflected in respondents' descriptions. The concepts that emerged in an analysis across themes and were used to organize descriptions were hostility, frustration, deprivation, and attachment.

Hostility was evidenced in the perpetrators' descriptions as an antagonistic attitude, aggressive acts, resentment, and opposition or resistance. Frustration was expressed as confusion and unresolved problems, uncertainty, and a feeling of dissatisfaction from unfulfilled needs or an inability to achieve desired goals. Deprivation was illustrated through dispossession or loss. Deprivation included the lack of resources, behavioral and emotional

skills, behavioral models, and emotional alliances. Attachment was evidenced by perpetrators' descriptions of enduring bonds and feelings in the contexts of primary relationships. Attachment also was expressed as feelings of responsibility and dependence.

Each of the themes were described through the use of these concepts. In addition, some of the respondents' descriptions of the context in which their violence occurred involved recurring issues of substance abuse and mutual violence.

#### I Didn't Have No Father

Consistent across the respondents' stories was the fact that their natural father was both physically and psychologically absent. This absence was usually attributed to desertion and/or divorce. In three instances, fathers died. Even so, in the single instance where the natural father was present in the household, the respondent indicated that his father was still "absent" emotionally in terms of paternal responsibility and involvement:

What I remember was that I didn't like it that he wasn't at home at times that I really wished that he was. A lot of times on the weekend, he would stay out drinking. He's not an alcoholic or anything, but he'd stay out drinking.

## Hostility

Much of the context for understanding the perpetrators' responses came from changes in tone of voice, content, body language, and general presentation. Hostility was generally recognized by increased tone and volume of answers, more constricted body movement, and emphatic answers that usually included anger, blaming, resistance, and opposition.

The respondents' hostility surrounding the absence of their fathers was often times expressed as anger and resentment:

[What do you like about your dad?] Nothing really. When he was home there was just lot's of bickering and yelling and they was just arguing all of the time. After my daddy left, things was much quieter and we were able to just have like a normal life.

I can't say that he was or is a good role model or even much of a father figure. We're just not on speaking terms. He doesn't write and I give up on that a long time ago.

This expression of hostility was not just due to the fathers' nonpresence, but also to the added burden of responsibility that this absence placed on the mother:

My mom really raised me. My dad, you know he would just come along.

I wished that he could have been more helpful to my momma.

We had all these people at home and my mother was having to work and all, and there wasn't much time for her to be able to be with us, and there he was with somebody else. I wasn't going to be like that.

An interesting aspect of the hostility associated with the fathers' absence was that even in those instances where a step-father was introduced to the family, the respondents hostile tone toward his natural father did not diminish.

### Frustration

Frustration, as opposed to hostility, usually was expressed with a questioning tone of voice. Body movements were generally more open and expressive; and content and tone usually suggested confusion, uncertainty, fear, and isolation. Deprivation, while presented much like frustration, was usually illustrated through the respondents' total expression of being "at a loss." This was presented with responses such as, *"I have no idea what you're talking about."* The one respondent who addressed this frustration directly, gave voice to it in a poignant way:

I can't say that he was or is a good role model or even much of a father figure. Over the past year, I've talked to him one time and it's been like that for four years. Now I could write him a letter every week. But when I do get a letter back, it's from my stepmom. I mean, I like hearing from her too, but I wrote to him. So I decided to give up on writing. Now we talk maybe

once or twice a year.

[Interviewer:] Sounds like that can be pretty frustrating?

[Respondent:] Not any more. I mean it was. I used to be looking for something. But not any more.

[Interviewer:] What were you looking for?

[Respondent:] An answer. I guess I was just looking to talk to him.

## Deprivation

One of the most clearly described consequences associated with the absence of the perpetrators' fathers was their continuing sense of being deprived of the positive role model their fathers might have offered them. Deprivation of male role models also was noted by the respondents' when addressing concerns about their own parenting competence. Such consequences of fathers' absence was probably best expressed by one man who talked of the difficulty he was having in trying to formulate a plan for teaching his own son how to be a good father:

It probably comes from not having a father. You know, I don't really know how he would relate things or how he was taught, so I'd have to come up with something on my own. Seems like you would just do things the way you were taught and I never really had that.

Another respondent also echoed a longing for a father he never really knew:

I missed having my true father there. If I could do it different, I'd like to have him around.

With the absence of the father, to some extent role models were experienced in the context of peer relationships:

There weren't many men in the house after my father passed. So, mostly, I got ideas from hanging out at the school.

But, of course, as articulated by respondents, there were some real limitations associated with peer learning:

Mostly it was just doing stuff and don't tell nobody. You know like go swimming and don't tell. Other than that, feelings and stuff like that, there wasn't anything like that.

I think that men need to know how to be in a relationship. I mean, it's not like a bunch of guys just running. There are other things that you have to do.

Another area that was effected by the absence of the respondents' fathers was the quality of sibling relationships. As noted by the descriptive statistics, the sample studied averaged 4 siblings with 46% of the sample in a "middle" position. This sibling context described by many of the respondents was restricted to a range of behaviors associated with adolescents deprived of adult involvement and authority. Thus, the process of conflict resolution in

sibling relationships usually meant "might makes right:"

Well, most of the time they won because they was bigger than I was. And also most of the time they would win because they was older than me. I was raised up to respect my brothers and whatever they said was probably right because they know more than I do. So, when I was growing up I didn't argue against them because I know that if they wanted to win they might bust me across the head.

In terms of those who were older siblings, they described being faced with burdens they were not really mature enough to shoulder. An older sibling described a context in which he felt pushed into the role of being a parent when he was still a child himself:

Well, I'm the second oldest in my family and I had to do it all, cook and clean, and I had one older brother. We was always the ones that had to take care of the family. We always knew how to provide. My mother and step-father were always having to work and we were there doing for the family. You know, clean house and all. I guess that I learned by being pretty much a parent.

#### Attachment

Attachment to father, expressed as responsibility, dependence, or any feelings of love, was singularly lacking in respondents' descriptions of their relationships with their fathers. In those cases where fond memories and recollections were recounted, it was when paternal loss was due to death. One respondent shared the following:

I always remember from before my father died. It was a long time ago and he used to get in the garden and work the garden, cut grass, and stuff like that. I remember that. He used to do it and I used to get out there with him. I remember he was out in the garden. He would have the tiller and I would go out there with him and sometimes I would hold on to the tiller while he was doing the gardening. I also remember my father used to work on cars. I like to work on cars.

Instances where paternal absence occurred from desertion and/or divorce, fathers were described as negative role models:

I knew that I had to be a better man than [my own father]. I was gonna be a better father. It's a man's job to be taking care of his family. I know what my mother had to do and how my father wasn't around to take care of things and I was gonna be a better father.

#### She Was a Hard Working Momma

The perpetrators' descriptions of their families of origin centered around a mother that attempted to take on the responsibility of being both a mother and father to her children. While noting the respondents' own beliefs in traditional family models, each reported a mother who was the primary caregiver, worked outside of the home, and was usually so overwhelmed by responsibilities that little "quality time" was available:

She worked hard and she was working as a waitress and taking care of three kids and I think that I saw that you need to be working hard. I'm sure that she had a hard time.

Even so, when speaking of their mothers, each of the respondents spoke of respect that was seldom afforded their partners. One respondent in comparing his mother and wife said:

I guess that one way that they are really different is that my mother was strong.

#### Hostility

Hostility expressed as anger, resentment, blaming, and opposition generally was not evidenced in the respondents' descriptions of their mothers. When asked specifically about things that they may not have liked about their mothers, responses were, at most, minimal:

I don't like that she smoked.

Only thing I can say I didn't like about my mom is things I wanted to do and she wouldn't let me. Those things are really probably unnecessary things and she was probably right.

She always had this curfew. A lot of guys could hang out all night and we always had to be in at this certain time.

For some of the respondents, anger and resentment were based more in the fact that mothers were seen as powerful

while they felt relatively powerless. When asked specifically about conflict and conflict resolution in their families of origin, responses were very much like the following:

My mother and my sisters were right and I was wrong.

If we did something that was wrong, she would just tell us and that was that.

Shit, when I was coming up my mother wouldn't have put up with the same stuff that my son do.

If we did wrong we knew it because we would have to deal with her.

I don't want to raise my son like my momma raised me. Because see, like when I played football, it was my cousin and my uncle that wanted me to play, but it was my decision. My son, it will be different. Ain't nobody gonna influence him and he's gonna decide what he wants to do.

I used to go to my cousins house to spend the weekend. Now his mother lied to my mother and said that I cussed her out. My cousin called the man that my mom was seeing at the time and told him, and the reason that I heard they called him was because they said that she wouldn't do nothing to him. Then he came back and told her and I had already talked to her about that, and I ended up getting a whipping anyway. Even after telling the truth. But see, they was grown-ups and I was a child. They took the grown-ups' word.

[Interviewer:] You didn't have much control of things when you were growing up?

[Respondent:] No. Mostly I was quiet.

## Deprivation

From the perpetrators' descriptions, when their mothers were home, much time was spent in taking care of household

chores and dispensing "swift justice" in disciplinary matters. The deprivation expressed by the respondents was usually reflected in the conflicting feelings surrounding their understanding of their mothers' responsibilities, and desire that she be at home:

I don't feel like she should be having to provide. Like a father should be going to work. She should stay home with the children and stay home with the kids.

We was supposed to do right. I think that she expected us to be able to take care of ourselves and to take care of things.

[I didn't like] being left. Like when I was just a little kid she would leave and say that my brother would be watching over me, and then he would leave and I would be left at home. I was just a little kid.

Well, there was two girls and just one boy. Nine out of ten the girls gonna play together. There was nothing for me to do but play by myself.

Deprivation also was expressed with some resentment when recounting their mothers' responsibilities to work. But even with some expressed resentment, there was understanding and clear resistance to express anger toward their only adult caregiver:

It was more like she was having to work and they was lots of times that we was just, sort or, you know, on our own. She worked a lot. She worked nights and was away a lot. And she was nice too.

## Frustration

When the respondents expressed frustration regarding their mothers, it was seldom directed toward her as an individual. Instead, frustration was usually expressed with a allusion to the perpetrators' understanding of their mothers' overwhelming circumstances:

I try to take up for her. You know, like what they try to teach men about how to be nice and how to treat them. I was really that way anyway.

She kinda, she wouldn't, she just kinda let everything build up until, and then she would just kinda come out with everything.

## Attachment

The most outstanding aspect of the respondents' descriptions of their mothers was that they providers for their families. Even with constant references to the desire for a traditional family structure, the role of provider that their mothers filled, was always referred to with pride and appreciation. At the same time, there was an understanding that a single mother had to direct her focus on providing the "necessities:"

If you really needed something and she could provide it, she would.

She provided for us and she was around.

She was a good provider. We didn't have everything, but she was able to provide.

Well, I tell you, she provided for us. If I had to have it, now it had to be something meaningful and worthwhile, she got it.

If there was something that we really needed, she would really try to get that for us.

Well, she took care of things. She was a hard working momma. She took care of the kids by herself. She wanted us to go to church and she was real active and hard working. She knew that if we needed something that she could get that for us. She would find a way to get it. A good parent ought to be able to do that sort of thing. You know, just take care of things and get the things that the family really needs.

Mothers were also described as strong. Their strength was reflected in keeping order and teaching responsibility:

She kept a good house. She would just say the things that we would have to do around the house. Like cutting grass or whatever. If there was something that we were supposed to do, she would just tell us to do it.

[She taught us responsibility] in like you know that there's something that's got to be done and you just do it.

My mother was strong. She was a strong wife. She would say what she wants.

Even though all of the respondents described some difficulty in communicating with their partners, when they spoke of their mothers this difficulty was not as consistently apparent:

Well, you know, my mom, I can go to her with whatever kind of problem. Whatever it may be. We can just sit down and talk about it.

She was always, uh, easy to talk too.

Another important aspect of teaching responsibility was their belief that their mothers were trying to teach them right from wrong:

I think that I was learning from her. You know, she would be doing one thing and expecting us to be able to know what's right, and I think that's what I learned.

Well, she would make us go to church and stuff. The kind of stuff that she would say would be more like if you're running with the wrong crowd and stuff, then you're gonna end up in jail. Some things she would say and we would go on and did it anyway and we would find out later that she was right.

But it was not always as simple as watching their mothers' behavior. For most, physical discipline was recognized as the marker for when an unacceptable line had been crossed:

If you did something wrong, you'd know it. Cause when she gets through whippin you, you'll think about it before the next time.

[How did she teach you right from wrong?]  
She'd take a belt to us.

[She would explain], this is wrong. If you do this, you're gonna get in trouble; you're gonna get whipped.

My mom and dad never whip me or beat me when I was coming up. I mean I got a whipping, but I never got a beating. It wasn't nothing like I didn't deserve. If I was wrong, I knew I was wrong, so I knew what they was saying.

It is interesting to note that while physical punishment was a constant element across all of the respondents' stories, there was never a tone or presentation of anger or hostility when recounting the dynamics of punishment. Physical punishment, for the most part, was identified as how the respondent could be sure that the message was serious:

If they said that you did something wrong, then it was wrong. You didn't get a beating for nothing, or a whipping for doing nothing. They had to be right. [In order for me to change] it normally had to get to a whipping. Once it got to that, then you decided that it was wrong. If someone tells you that something is wrong, that's sort of like getting off, but you also know that the next time you're probably gonna get a whipping.

#### We Wasn't Communicating

A good father is, uh, oh damn. Uh, someone that can, uh, that's a hard one. Maybe just being able to work together on things, don't get mad, and learn to talk about things more. That's one thing that we've had some trouble with, is talking about things more. She talks a bit and then she closes up on me and I close up on her. I could tell you a lot. I tell you, anybody can get to a breaking point, just about anybody.

A frequently occurring theme throughout the interviews

was communication processes. Communication is generally considered to be the transmission of information by speech, writing, or signs. It could certainly be argued that the demonstration of violent physical acts are forms of communication. However, the focus of this study was not to document the variety of ways in which perpetrators used violence. Therefore, communication will be limited to the respondents' own views of communication, which was through talking.

### Hostility

Among the sample interviewed in this study, communication was regularly described in terms of "before and after" the intervention program. While there is no doubt concerning the commission of a crime, in the arena of communication the blame for the assault may be shared, owned, or fully passed to the perpetrators' partner.

Shared blame for poor communication skills usually highlighted the quick escalation from words to action:

It's that we don't talk much. I think that we could improve. See, a lot of times, on certain situations, we just don't talk about our feelings. I'll get mad and break a bottle and after the bottle gets broken then it's too late then. Most of the time we just get really mad and don't say nothing. And then, if I'm really pissing her off, she'll say that. And then I say, why don't you say something first?

I married the wrong person. We didn't have any way to communicate. She couldn't sit down and tell me what was wrong without screaming and hollering, and I did the same thing.

Hostile communication that was owned by the respondent reflected a sense of personal responsibility but no real understanding of how it was triggered:

Well, it was like before I would just really get into stuff pretty quick. You know, like I would really get mad without really having any reason. I might really go off on her.

When the perpetrators' hostility was blamed on the victim, the respondent might either identify himself as "victimized," or categorize his hostility as a "learning experience:"

They said that it was assault, but I felt like I was assaulted.

Well, just by the way I talk. I tell her. Used too, if she thought I was mad, she'd argue back with me. I'd tell her, hey look, you just need to leave me alone. Just leave me alone. She's always nagging and calling me names. Cussing me, and she knows that I can't stand that. You know, that's when usually I'd slap her or something. She'd just go on and on until I just couldn't think no more. Something would usually happen. But now she knows. She learnt that if she thinks I'm mad at her, then she'll just leave me alone and won't push the way that she used too.

When the respondents' expressed hostility in

communication after the intervention program, poor skills and deficits were placed entirely on the shoulders of the victims:

In a way [nothing gets resolved]. In a way it don't, because see, she's gonna believe what [her son] say, regardless. When we get to arguing about it, I just get tired of it and I just leave and go somewhere. My wife's the type person that when she's right, she's right. She ain't wrong. You could have proof right there in her face and she don't see it. She don't want you to prove it to her. She already knows she's right. [Her son] can't be lying. Even if you was there and he wasn't. So far as getting resolved, sometimes we'll sit down and talk about our problems, and sometimes it works and sometimes it don't.

She'll just sit in the car and say nothing. She's silent and won't speak at all.

She tends to, uh, well she tends to start arguments on the weekends so that she can storm out of the house and do what she wants to do. That's the biggest problem that I have with her.

### Frustration

We just don't talk about our feelings. I was trying to tell her what I was feeling and I was thinking about what I wanted to say, but sometimes it just don't come out the way that I want it too. And then we get to arguing and stuff. And then just one thing lead to another and I hit her before I knew it. Just sort of lost my head. I just wanted to tell her that I wanted to be with her.

The respondents' expressions of frustration with communication processes were presented in a variety of ways. One was their own frustration at trying to express their

desires and feelings to their partners and being what many described as "misunderstood." This misunderstanding usually escalated to increased vocal tone, more frustration, mutual yelling, and finally physical violence:

It was just a misunderstanding.

I just wanted her to see my point of view.

Another area of frustration seemed to be associated with long-held beliefs that it might be safest not to express feelings. The result of this approach was usually a "blow-up" of emotions:

I wouldn't talk to nobody. Mostly I just stayed to myself. I guess it got started when people were picking on me and when people were picking on [my sisters]. I didn't like it when people were picking on me, but I liked it even less when people were picking on them. See, I never expressed my feelings to anyone. I kept everything inside. I think most people didn't care what I was thinking no way.

Me, I let things build up inside instead of letting them out and stuff. I just let things go and go and then I get edgy and nervy and I really needed to learn how to talk to my companion.

A third area of communication frustration was expressed by noting that after the program intervention, although many of the perpetrators were trying to utilize and practice new communication skills, their partners were sometimes not as cooperative as they felt they should be:

I figure that, me being, by coming to these groups, I had thought about it before, it's really a good thing because I was looking for something. And when I got started I wanted her to be able to go to the meetings too so that she would understand a lot of it. It's O.K. for me because I really got some progress from this. But I figure that if she's with me, you know, it might be better.

A real problem is that they didn't have anything for my partner to do. See, they had me going but they didn't have my partner to go. So, it's just like saying, we're gonna teach him. We're gonna teach him one thing, but we're not going to say nothing to her. I know they're saying that I was wrong. But they wasn't looking at whether or not she could have been wrong too.

You know, we all got some screw-up ways. I'm getting counseling, but she still has got her ways. It's like we both ought to have to be here. It never is just one somebody.

## Deprivation

Pre-program intervention communication deficits were further described by the respondents as resulting from a lack of behavioral models and skills:

Before the program, I really didn't have any way of settling any kind of argument that would work. I guess I would just say that I didn't like something and leave it at that. Not the greatest method in the world. Didn't work most of the time.

We didn't have any way to communicate. She couldn't sit down and tell me what was wrong without screaming and hollering and I did the same thing. It just got out of hand.

It was not the purpose of this study to present a

program evaluation for the participating Domestic Violence Intervention Program. Even so, during the course of the interviews, it was interesting to discover some level of insight into a modeling process that may have contributed to the respondents' styles of communication:

[Interviewer:] You said earlier that you either stormed or were silent when you were angry. Do you think you learned that somewhere?

[Respondent:] From my mom.

I kind of think that [girls] learn by watching their mother and all, don't they? How their mother does stuff and how their mother pays bills and does little things like that, you know. But she probably picks up how her mother would argue and stuff too, you know. I guess that I do argue the way that [my mother] did. You know, I kind of lose my temper in a hurry.

#### Attachment

All of the respondents were still in a primary relationship. Many were still in a relationship with the victim of the assault for which they were arrested. When discussing their current relationship, most of the respondents emphasized some form of improved communication skills. This was always presented with some degree of pride of accomplishment. The respondents' recounting of increased and improved communication patterns was seen as a form of attachment due to the consistent references to how a once poor relationship was now improved:

I know that you can't get along 100% of the time. But when you don't, you sit down and discuss [the problems].

Honest. Be honest. If you have a problem, talk about it and don't let it get out of hand. Communication.

[Now] I'll just tell her. I mean, I can show that I'm mad and I say that that's something that makes me mad.

[Now we're] able to work stuff out and negotiate. To not get into any kind of one-up kind of situation.

I guess if you want something out of a relationship, you have to give something. You have to give something to get something. Something like a negotiation. A lot of stuff was helpful, like learning about negotiating and decision making. You never think about negotiating with your partner. In the group, they taught how you can give something to get something. If you really want something, it's best to try to help the other person too. Before, if I wanted to do something, if I wanted to go somewhere, I would just go.

Just, uh, for me, just being able to talk about family problems and how to cope with them and how to control my temper. How to talk and how to communicate. Teaching me how to do things to help her out and to help me out. To be able to negotiate.

### Guys are Strong and Girls are Sweet

No, she wouldn't have a job. They should be with kids. Especially as good as my wife is with kids in teaching them and stuff. She's a really good mother and all. Sometimes she's tough as a wife, but she's a good mother.

The most consistent theme throughout each of the interviews was the respondents' belief in traditional gender

roles. An interesting feature of these descriptions was that none of the respondents indicated that they had been part of such a family while growing up. As a matter of fact, the majority of respondents came from single family homes with the primary caregiver identified as a working mother. In the respondents' locational family, both the respondent and his partner are working and to some extent sharing the responsibility for child care. This reality may suggest that the respondents' insistence on the appropriateness of such a model is a fantasized or idealized version of the way it "should be."

### Hostility

Most of the hostility surrounding the theme of gender role assignment appears to be directed toward the respondents' victims, and based in a comparison between the respondents' expectations and their current family circumstances:

Alright, I think that if [women] want a job, they should provide a good place to watch the kids. I personally think that women ought to stay at home until the kids get old enough to go to school.

[Interviewer:] What about your partner?

[Respondent:] She just doesn't feel the way that a mom should feel. Even when she's not working, she doesn't watch my little girl like she ought too.

[My wife], well, she's not a partner.

[A good wife] is basically the same as a mother. Moral support and take care of the kids.

[Interviewer:] What do you like about your wife?

[Respondent:] She's a lot like my mother in that both of them love their kids.

[What do you not like:] She's just too lenient with [the kids].

When a woman works it needs to be like a morning shift or something like that because the kids are in school.

Hostility expressed through what "should be" in traditional gender roles is not limited to aspects of child care. In addition, hostility is clearly expressed in views that a husband should be the dominant partner in the dyad:

I think that by me being her husband, I have a right to argue with her the way that I see fit. I ought to be left alone to yell, if that's something that works.

I don't feel like she should be having to provide. A father should be going to work and she should stay home.

Women are supposed to be able to take care of things in the house and men are supposed to take care of the family. That's just the way that things are supposed to be.

I guess in her mind, I'm supposed to make the decisions.

### Frustration and Deprivation

Frustration and deprivation seem inextricably tied together in that the respondents consistently expressed views regarding what "should be" the dynamics and roles of each gender, while at the same time noting that they had no real model for such a dynamic:

[Interviewer:] What is a good father?

[Respondent:] Taking care of the family. Being someone you can look up to. You know, being a role model.

[Interviewer:] You mean like being around? Being able to set a good example?

[Respondent:] Yeah. You have to be around to be a good role model.

[Interviewer:] What about your dad?

[Respondent:] He died when I was about two. It wasn't like I had any kind of special role model.

[Interviewer:] Who was your primary caregiver?

[Respondent:] My mom.

[Interviewer:] What's a good father?

[Respondent:] A father should provide for his children and his family and discipline them when they need it. [He should] spend a lot of time with them. Be there for his spouse when she needs him. Help her with the kids when she wants. Kinda work together.

[Interviewer:] What is a good father?

[Respondent:] Well, that's a hard one because my father was never around when I was growing up. I guess, maybe, helping out. Helping out his son or daughter. Fixing things and helping them with their work.

Gender role assignments were usually not linked to an identifiable model. However, some respondents' views did appear to emanate logically from aspects of their experiences in their families of origin:

When I was growing up, my sisters did most of the house cleaning while my mom was at work. I used to do it too. Then she told me you don't have to do that. She said that since I was a boy, I didn't have to do that. [After that], mostly I just played. When I got bigger, I started to do yard work, cutting the grass, and working in the garden. Stuff like my daddy, you know.

I would see the things that my step-father would do that seemed to be the good things about taking

care of the family and I would try to do those things. Like working and taking care of responsibilities.

## Attachment

Attachment has been defined as identification of enduring bonds, feelings, and responsibility to the primary relationship and to the family. Nowhere is this more evident than the perpetrators' responses when speaking of what their role or responsibility to their families entail:

Just take care of things and get the things that the family really needs.

Care for your family and be able to work and love your family and take care of the children. Be a good role model for children.

A good father and a good husband would be trying to meet everyone's needs.

Just keep a job. Keep the bills paid. You know, financial problems can cause trouble in the home. Provider for my family.

Be a leader. Be more responsible and more mature than a boy. Take care of your family and your bills and stuff. Going out and getting a job and making money.

We should take care of each other. Didn't nobody teach me that. I just learned it on my own.

He's a strong person, he's a provider, he's a support for his family, he's there for his family, he's there when they need him in good times and bad times. He's the rock of the family.

Traditional and idealized gender roles are clearly evident in the respondents' views and expectations of

themselves and their partners. But while this is often a source of hostility and frustration, meeting some of these expectations resulted in a clear sense of pride in accomplishment:

I'm a good provider.

I feel like I can provide for my children.

I ain't never been out of work. I take real pride in my jobs. Even if I do something around the house, I just take real pride in what I do. That's just the way that I am.

I am able to provide for my family.

I like that I am a provider for my family and that I work hard. I like that I lived to see 34 years old and that I'm still around. And I like that my life isn't too messed up. All I can ask is that I can be a provider for my family.

### Summary

The results of this study indicate that with court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse, there is a clear association with the use of alcohol, perpetrator employment history, and level of violence in differentiating perpetrators who complete an intervention program from those that do not.

This study also has indicated that an absent father, overwhelmed mother, poor communication skills, and traditional and idealized gender roles are all themes in the court-referred perpetrators' life histories. Contextually within those themes are elements of hostility, frustration,

deprivation, and attachment. While it was true that the emerging characteristics were framed by the particular substantive frame of the interviews, it is of interest that there were remarkable similarities in the perpetrators' presentations. It should also be noted that while the various issues discussed in the review of the literature indicated that there may be some overall "cultural acceptance" of violent acts, cultural beliefs relating to acceptance of violence did not emerge as a characteristic theme.

An absent father and an overwhelmed mother are themes primarily confined to the perpetrators' childhood experiences. Communication patterns and traditional and idealized gender roles appear to be most evident in the perpetrators' adult partner relationships.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

Data analysis procedures in this study were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative analysis of data revealed significant associations with the intervention program completion status of court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse and their use of alcohol, employment history, level of violence, and victims hospitalization at the time of the perpetrators' arrest. Further data were presented to suggest a possible association between the perpetrators' level of violence at the time of arrest and the use of alcohol.

The analysis of qualitative data suggested that the following characteristics were recurring themes in interviews with perpetrators who were court-referred for partner abuse: an absent father, an overwhelmed mother, poor interpersonal communication processes, and traditional and idealized gender roles. Concepts emerged across the identified themes. These concepts were hostility, frustration, deprivation, and attachment.

This study has offered a relatively clear profile of perpetrators of partner abuse. What has not been presented is a clear picture of what may differentiate these men from

a comparable group of men who are not batterers. In lieu of a comparative control sample, speculation may center around the apparent void with which many of the perpetrators seemed to describe their lives. As one man indicated when asked about "being a man" and "role models:"

For the most part these are things that I never think about. It's sort of like walking on stage and trying to do opera. I've never thought about what it means to be a man or anything like that. It's sort of alien. It's just something that you don't have to think about.

For the most part, these men appeared not just to experience the loss of an absent father and an overburdened mother, but also the lack of any consistent adult influence. There might be conjecture that a comparable group of non-battering men would have some dependable adult influence not just as a role model, but also acting as a type of caretaker who has the time for not just the enforcement of rules, but for guidance, encouragement, and positive reinforcement.

It was noted that common theoretical approaches to the study of domestic violence usually addresses etiology. This study chose instead to examine the individual characteristics of the perpetrators in an attempt to describe "who" instead of "why." A discussion on this study's findings as related to the literature follows.

### Quantitative Findings

Even with the advent of comprehensive interagency intervention programs, minimal research has been done to adequately offer descriptive analyses of court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse. For the most part, perpetrators have been presented in psychological studies suggesting various types of pathology, social science examinations that suggest social and situational stressors which precipitate violence, and/or descriptions from victims that generally support Walker's (1979) *cycle of violence*. The present study found both consistencies and contradictions with the current domestic violence literature.

### Demographics

The present study was generally consistent with demographic data in the literature that reports the perpetrator to be around 30 years old, in a blue-collar job, married under 10 years, and with a high school education (see Hamberger and Hastings, 1986; Pirog-Good and Stets-Kealey, 1985; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980). Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) have reported that the perpetrator is unemployed or underemployed, and this was not consistent with the present study where greater than 60% of the perpetrators were skilled laborers with stable employment.

Many studies have reported an association between violent behaviors and the use of alcohol (see Flanzer, 1993; Nichols, 1986; Walker, 1979). This held true in the present study where 56% of the perpetrators were drinking at the time of arrest. It also has been reported that "families with four or more children are found disproportionately in abuse statistics" (Burgess & Draper, 1989, p. 61). In the present study, the average number of children in the household is two. It may be that this finding is more indicative of an insufficient amount of time together for the perpetrator and victim to have produced more than two children.

In regard to ethnic origin, the domestic violence reports contradictory data with Pirog-Good and Stets-Kealey (1985) reporting a predominately caucasian population, and Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) reporting primarily a minority population. In the present study, 65% of the sample were African American. However, this percentage reflects an over representation that may be related to institutionalized racism in the legal system. Thus, a disproportionate number of minority men are both arrested and adjudicated to treatment programs.

#### Completers v. Non-completers

Findings from the present study support a significant association between the use of alcohol and perpetrators'

program completion status. In addition, high frequencies were noted when comparing perpetrator drinking and a potentially life threatening level of violence. Alcohol use and abuse is a factor that needs to be considered not just with the occurrence of violence but also with the likelihood of program completion and the level of violence.

There was some incongruence between findings in the present study and the domestic violence literature in regard to perpetrator employment. While it is suggested that unemployment or underemployment is associated with violence (see Burgess & Draper, 1989; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), the majority of the sample in this study were employed in relatively stable situations appropriate to training and experience. A significant association was found between comparing perpetrators' employment history with intervention program completion status. This may be consistent with psychological explanations of battering (see Beasley, 1991; Hayes-Gary, 1992; Offutt, 1989) that suggest levels of pathology in batterers. Consistent with many diagnosed personality disorders, the batterer that is unlikely to remain in stable employment would just as unlikely be able to complete an intervention program.

A significant association was also found between the perpetrators' level of violence and intervention completion status. Gondolf (1988) suggested three different "types" of batterers including a "typical" batterer, an "antisocial,"

and a "sociopathic" batterer. The latter two types of perpetrators may not only demonstrate more severe forms of violence, but also may possess some traits consistent with psychological pathology. If so, a possible explanation for the association of lower levels of program completion with more severe violence may be the presence of such pathological traits. Such perpetrators would be less amenable to treatment.

### Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data analyses suggested that a constricted range of emotional and behavioral responses associated with characteristics of an absent father, an overwhelmed mother, poor communication skills, and traditional and idealized gender roles were present with the sample. Concepts emerging from these themes were aspects of hostility, frustration, deprivation, and attachment. These findings are consistent with many of the theoretical perspectives in the current domestic violence literature.

#### Absent Father

The context within which the respondents viewed their fathers' absence was very often one of frustration and deprivation at the lack of emotional and financial support from the fathers. Somewhat consistent with a general systems theory perspective, deprivation of an adult male

presence in the home created a type of circularity (see Nichols & Schwartz, 1991) in which father absence lead to the shifting of responsibilities to the remaining household members. In addition, perceptions of "fathering" were based not in reality, but in the interpretations and attributes assigned to a fantasized and idealized sense of what a father was.

#### Overwhelmed Mother

A repeated component of the respondents' descriptions of their "hard working momma," was that of a woman stretched too thin with little time for quality interaction and verbal discipline methods in dealing with her children. A common description might include that they were told when they did something wrong, they were spanked, and they were responsible for sharing household chores. With the sample studied, physical discipline was reported by all of the respondents. The context for this discipline was not one of "unacceptable" beating, but rather "appropriate" whipping for what the respondents themselves described as unacceptable behaviors. This is consistent with the domestic violence literature that proposes social learning factors as a component of the perpetrators' histories.

General systems and attribution theories also appeared to apply to the respondents' descriptions. Many of these respondents spoke not just of their present and family of

origin circumstances, but also of how their lives, and the lives of their mothers "should be." There also were many cross-reference comparisons by the respondents between their current partners and their mothers. This suggested the presence of attributional assignments developed in childhood that carried over to adult relationships.

### Poor Communication Skills

One of the most consistent themes regarding current intimate relationships dealt with the lack of adequate communication skills to express thoughts and desires clearly. The low level of effective communication skills could probably be traced to a lack of adequate modeling and instruction. This seems consistent with a social learning perspective which states that the learning process is developed through observation and imitation (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Evans, 1989).

The hostility and blame that was present in the respondents' stories seemed more indicative of the underlying principles in feminist theoretical perspectives. Feminist perspectives maintain that when applied to domestic violence, male power and control are the motivating factors in aggressive behaviors (Avis, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo, 1993). Many of the respondents' presentations of hostile communication patterns reflected a desire to maintain or regain control of the situation.

Some respondents described hostile interactions as being clearly interdependent in their relationships. In these instances, the respondents seemed to indicate that the resulting violence was an escalation of aggressive behaviors, mutual in nature, and was a common feature of both members' behavior patterns. This is consistent with studies that suggest that relationship violence is a relatively common feature in American families and that in some instances hostility and/or violence are mutual (see Straus, 1993; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Gelles, 1993).

#### Traditional and Idealized Gender Roles

The domestic violence literature generally presents the perpetrator as someone who believes in traditional gender role assignments (see Dutton, 1988; Schechter, 1982; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979). The most consistent theme throughout each of the respondents' presentations was this belief in a traditional and idealized model. The most noteworthy aspect related to this presentation is that none of the respondents reported anything close to such a model in either their family of origin or with their current significant relationship.

It would be easy to assign the respondents' desire to "keep the woman at home" to the feminist perspective that suggests the element of male domination and control. In

some cases, this may be part of the explanation. However, what came through most consistently throughout the interviews was the respondents' desire to create a family they never had and their ability to approximate such an idealized fantasy in their current situation.

Their perspective on the assignment of family roles and responsibilities did not just include the woman's role as primary caregiver for the children. It also was a mandate for male responsibility to maintain employment, provide material necessities for the family, and to "be there" as a role model and source of strength for his children and his spouse. While the role in itself would relegate the wife to a disempowered financial position, this did not appear as the primary motivation in the respondents' presentations. Instead, the basis for such beliefs appeared to be an attributional quality assigned to what "should have been" or "could have been" during the respondents' childhoods if circumstances had been different.

#### Implications

The purpose of this study was to present a socio-demographic profile of the court-referred perpetrator of domestic violence and to present a variety of themes that characterize the perpetrators' lives, relationships, and experiences. A long term objective for this study was to assist future theory development, to contribute to a

cumulative body of research, and to provide valuable information for clinicians who continue to struggle in search of effective ways to diminish the incidence of domestic violence.

### Implications for Theory

The findings from the present study highlighted the need for continuing theoretical work in terms of explaining domestic violence. There are currently many theoretical perspectives that describe men who batter in terms of limited parameters. In reality, the complex picture of domestic violence involves cognitions, life stresses, pathology, and family histories of batterers. There are many factors that must be considered before a holistic perspective can be drawn. Greater attention needs to be given to attempts to synthesize across theoretical perspectives rather than continuing the battle to validate any one perspective and as a result invalidate others.

Further, scholars need to develop theories that reflect the variation apparent across perpetrators. All perpetrators are not the same and little attention has been directed to what types of perpetrators are best understood from various theoretical perspectives.

### Implications for Research

There has been a great deal of research in the area of domestic violence pertaining to risk factors and general demographic descriptions. This study has attempted to broaden these descriptions by providing data on a group of men under represented in earlier studies, that is, court-referred perpetrators. Earlier studies often relied on samples drawn from women entering treatment rather than men. Further research with samples drawn from such populations needs to be conducted. In addition, as the issues surrounding domestic violence become more visible and alarming, future research should address sampling issues so that inappropriate generalizations can be avoided.

Clear guidelines also need to be established and maintained for on-going clinical intervention evaluation and research. In essence, there is a need to answer questions about the effectiveness of different treatment programs with different types of perpetrators.

### Implications for Practice

"If the psychosocial-learning theory of violent behavior is accurate, then batterers can be taught to relearn their aggressive responses" (Walker, 1979, p. 28).

Based on what is currently implied by the literature on domestic violence (see Gondolf, 1988; NCJFCJ, 1992; Straus, 1993), it is assumed that relationship violence is

relatively common, there are different "types" of batterers, and for those batterers who can change a structured, interagency model is most effective. Even so, before intervention models can reach their greatest level of efficacy, there must be a clearer picture of those batterers who are more likely to benefit from treatment.

This study produced several findings that may be applied to clinical settings. Comparisons of program completers versus non-completers indicated that non-completers were more likely to have been drinking at the time of arrest and to have used a potentially life threatening level of violence. An association between alcohol use and violent behaviors has been long documented. But when applied to the clinical interventions of court-referred perpetrators, many programs may assume that a referral or requirement to a tertiary alcohol treatment program adequately addresses the problem. In the present study, 69% of those perpetrators who did not complete the program were drinking at the time of arrest. In addition, well over half of the sample (56%) were using alcohol at the time of their arrest. This suggests need for a comprehensive alcohol abuse component to be included in effective interventions.

An association was also indicated between the level of violence and the perpetrators' completion status. While this may suggest some inadequacies in the participating

agencies screening processes, it also highlights the continuing need for a thorough evaluation of the victims' safety. Current clinical models for domestic violence perpetrator intervention are usually done outside of the confines of jail (NCJFCJ, 1992). A comprehensive program would not only institute a screening process that adequately identifies perpetrators appropriate for such treatment, but would take the necessary steps to protect the victim from further battering.

Additional associations were noted between program completion and employment history. This too may indicate that additional screening procedures could more adequately identify those perpetrators who are most likely to complete clinical intervention. It also underscores the need for interagency cooperation in terms of job training and access to opportunities for stable employment.

In the qualitative analyses of the participating perpetrators, the most consistent theme when asked about program benefits dealt with improved communication skills. While each of the themes will help direct the clinician to further insight of the perpetrator, it is important to note that improved abilities in expression and negotiation were identified by the perpetrators themselves as having the most benefit to an improved relationship. It is not enough to simply extinguish violent behavior. Other skills must be learned for handling conflict with partners as well.

### Summary

Consistent across contemporary studies of domestic violence are descriptions of the perpetrators' learned violent behaviors and controlling "traditionalist" attitudes. This study of court-referred perpetrators of partner abuse appeared to disclose that the violent episodes demonstrated by the perpetrators were from a constricted range of behavioral responses due to the lack of modeling as opposed to imitation. The issue at hand appeared to that of an *absent* father as opposed to a *battering* one. In addition, the traditional gender role assignments expressed by the respondents seemed to emerge from an idealized fantasy of what family responsibilities "should be" rather than what they experienced.

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