CHANGE IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:

THE DOMESTIC COUPLE’S PERSPECTIVE ON PERPETRATOR CHANGE

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CHANGE IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:
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ABSTRACT

CHANGE IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:
THE DOMESTIC COUPLE’S PERSPECTIVE ON PERPETRATOR CHANGE
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Recent meta-analytic studies, looking at outcome research of perpetrator intervention programs for intimate partner violence, have concluded that treatment has little to no effect on recidivism. There is a lot of skepticism about the effectiveness of treatment for perpetrators of intimate partner violence, and some are even skeptical that these perpetrators are capable of change. There is a need for a new, more-in-depth approach to the study of change in intimate partner violence. To get a better picture of change, this research study breaks with the prevailing quantitative approach focused on recidivism, and returns to a qualitative, grounded-theory approach focused on understanding the change process from the perspectives of intimate partners (perpetrators and their victims).

This study focused on the stories and experiences of 7 heterosexual, domestic couples. Each of these couples experienced violence in their relationship and received intervention and/or support services specifically addressing this violence. Each of these couples had been free of physical violence for more than a year and showed some
positive change in intimate partner violence. Some perpetrators had demonstrated profoundly significant change after many years in the process, and yet, all were still in the process of change.

A 5-stage model of change resulted, based on grounded-theory qualitative analysis. The model was named the Change Model of Intimate Partner Violence (CMIPV). It is based on 126 years of collective personal experiences of the change process. Their experiences were communicated through 14 hours of interviews, resulting in 300 transcription pages. The content of these interviews was reduced to 330 descriptions of change, 130 descriptions of contributing factors, and 123 descriptions of the process.

The CMIPV that emerged from this analysis opened the door to new ways of thinking about change in intimate partner violence. The CMIPV may be foundational for perpetrator intervention strategies that specifically target stages of change. This study provided a valuable, never-before-documented perspective on intimate partner violence. In addition, it added new and promising theory to the literature concerning intimate partner violence and the introduction of a new model worthy of ongoing investigation.

The electronic version of this dissertation can be found at the OhioLink ETD Center: www.ohiolink.edu/etd
Dedication

This research study is dedicated to the research participants who have given themselves to the process of change and have graciously gifted us with their stories and experiences.
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people, and groups of people, to thank for their contributions to this research study. I want to thank the dissertation committee, Dr. Patricia Linn, Dr. Nancy Murphy, and Dr. Liang Tien for their contribution to the process from start to finish. In addition I want to thank two other faculty members at Antioch University, Dr. Molly Reid and Dr. Mary Wieneke, for their helpful suggestions along the way. I also want to thank the other Psy.D. students at Antioch University who participated in the peer review process which honed the direction and quality of this research study.

I also want to thank the Northwest Association of Domestic Violence Treatment Providers (NWADVTP) for helping me find participants, allowing me to speak at their annual conference, and using their communication network. Although they will go unnamed to help protect the confidentiality of the research participants, I also want to thank the specific treatment professionals, from within this association and from outside this association, who helped me find research participants and gave me valuable consultation along the way. I want to specifically thank Northwest Family Life, where I interned, for opening my eyes to the issue of intimate partner violence, for their work to end domestic violence, and for inspiring the direction of this research study.

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Change in Intimate Partner Violence:

The Domestic Couple’s Perspective on Perpetrator Change

Introduction

Despite the attention it has received in recent years, intimate partner violence continues to be a significant problem in the health of our society. The most alarming statistics concern women as victims and men as perpetrators of the violence.

The U.S. Bureau of Justice has relied on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to define the scope of the issue. A large percentage of both fatal and non-fatal violent crimes are between intimate partners. Intimate partner violence resulted in 1,544 deaths in 2004. Of these deaths, 75% were females and 25% were males. The NCVS estimates that intimate partners committed 30% of the homicides and 22% of the non-fatal violent crimes against women and 5% of the homicides and 4% of the non-fatal violent crimes against men (average from 2001-2005). These statistics primarily represent crimes against the opposite gender: 96% of the non-fatal, intimate-partner violent crimes against women were committed by men and 82% of the non-fatal, intimate-partner violent crimes against men were committed by women (U.S. Department of Justice Statistics, 2008).

The National Center for Disease Control (2006) has relied more on the results of the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) than the NCVS to define the scope of the issue. Results from the NVAWS indicate that the percentages are much
higher if you include acts of intimate partner violence that never get reported to the
criminal justice system. The results show that 25% of women, and 8% of men report
having been raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, a cohabiting
partner, or a date (Thoennes & Tjaden, 1998). This is in contrast to the NCVS results,
which indicate that less than one percent of the population reported each year a non-fatal
violent crime by an intimate partner (based on the report rate of 5.1 incidents per 1000
persons (U.S. Department of Justice Statistics, 2008). Based on the NVAW survey, it has
been estimated that each year, women are victims of about 4.8 million intimate partner
related physical assaults and rapes and men are the victims of about 2.9 million intimate
partner related physical assaults (Thoennes & Tjaden, 2000). In 1995, the cost of intimate
partner violence was estimated at $5.8 billion, which included the cost of medical care,
mental health services, and lost productivity. Updated to 2003 dollars, this was estimated
as equivalent to more than $8.3 billion, which includes $6.2 billion for physical assault,
$1 billion for stalking and rape, and $1.2 billion in the value of lost lives (Max, Rice,
Finkelstein, Bardwell, and Leadbetter, 2004).

Our awareness of intimate partner violence has increased significantly since the
term - *domestic violence* - was introduced three decades ago. In recent literature, *intimate
partner violence* is the new term that is phasing out the established term *domestic
violence*. Even though the concept of intimate partner violence is relatively new, it is well
understood that intimate partner violence is not just a problem of recent history, but that it
only began to be seriously addressed as the voices of battered women began to be heard.

In 1985, the U.S. Surgeon General declared family violence a national epidemic.
Since then, organizations such as the American Medical Association and the U.S.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have made similar declarations.

Despite the difficulty of gathering precise statistics, these groups and others believe that family abuse and violence are significantly under-reported and that large segments of the population, especially women and children, are affected. (American Psychological Association, 1996, p. 1)

Many are glad that, since then, there has been, finally, a more substantial institutional response to intimate partner violence, which has developed significantly over the last 30 years; and at the same time, recent meta-analytic studies are showing that our country’s primary domestic violence intervention programs are either not effective or only minimally effective at reducing intimate partner violence (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005).

At this critical time in the development of an institutional response to intimate partner violence, when the effectiveness of intervention programs is being challenged, it is important to take a closer look and to listen thoughtfully to domestic partners who have been through the experience of intimate partner violence, and who have participated in intervention services. We need to better understand their experience, and we need to better understand: If change can and does happen, what changes? ... And how does it happen?

Intimate partner violence has received a lot of attention in the literature. In 2008, there were over 10,000 published documents addressing issues of intimate partner violence. If there is so much written on the subject, one would have to wonder, what is still missing from our understanding? The answer to this question emerges from a historical review of the development of our institutional response to intimate partner
violence and a thorough review of the literature which supports the term *domestic violence*.

The next two sections of this report (history/context and literature review) present the background that has led to the rationale behind this research study. These sections bring to light the contextual history, the research literature, and recent meta-analytic findings, and lead the reader to a summary which defends returning to a more qualitative, grounded-theory approach to researching intimate partner violence.

This review shows that, although the initial response to intimate partner violence began by listening to the voices of battered women, research, which is focused on intervention programs, is no longer informed by that voice. Since quantitative, meta-analytic research, focused on intervention programs, is telling us very little about what is working, it is important to return to a more in-depth analysis of intimate partner violence and the change process; and most poignantly, research on intervention programs needs to return to a viewpoint that includes the victim’s perspective.

**History and Context**

Public discourse and political debate influence the recognition and naming of social issues. Naming occurs through the assignment of language and the subsequent labels that define the social issue. The question always lingers: Who has ownership of the issue? (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004, p. 49)

**Naming Violence**

Incidents of intimate partner violence were once called *domestic disputes*, which facilitated turning a blind eye to violence in the home. Society at large, the law, and law
enforcement would rarely intervene in family issues. Institutions tended to stay out of
domestic disputes, strongly influenced by the belief that society should stay out of family
matters.

The term, *domestic disputes*, facilitated the prevailing structure of patriarchal
control of the family. It also supported a society and its institutions that did not want to
get involved in challenging the man’s authority in the family and his privilege to run the
home the way he wanted. Violence was not a term associated with family life. Violence
was conceptualized as something that occurred between strangers rather than within
families and between close relationships (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999).

The first type of intimate violence to be regarded as a serious social problem was
child abuse. *Family Violence* was the first established term that called it violence. In the
beginning of its conception in the U.S, in the 1960s and 1970s, family violence focused
almost exclusively on child abuse and ignored spousal abuse. A landmark article
launched the issue of child abuse into U.S. media attention in 1962. The article was titled
“The Battered-Child Syndrome” and was published in the Journal of the American

Child abuse could be addressed without being a threat to male authority in the
family. In those days mothers were more heavily researched than fathers, for their role in
parenting and child abuse. At that time, there was little mention of domestic violence or
battered women in the literature. “Even into the 1960s and 1970s, psychologists and
sociologists paid little attention to sexual and domestic violence, and to the extent that
they addressed it, they often blamed women” (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999, p. 235).
However, allowing the concept of family violence to gain exposure shifted the prevailing understanding of violence from an act between strangers towards an act between loved ones. In more recent years, *family violence* has become a more encompassing term, casting a wide net over all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect in domestic settings. Currently, *family violence* includes intimate partner violence under its umbrella of concern, due, in large part, to the persistent outcry of the battered women’s movement.

The battered women’s movement began over three decades ago, as a grass roots response, by women, to help other women escape male violence. Offering a theoretical concept of battering, women assumed ownership over the issue and moved it from a private family matter to one of public concern (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004, p. 49).

The term - *domestic violence* - was founded, defined, and contextualized by the battered women’s movement. It is a term that focused exclusively on male domestic violence against women. Our current criminal justice response to intimate partner violence was shaped by the battered women’s movement and their shaping of the term *domestic violence*.

*The Duluth Model*

The Duluth Model came out of the battered women’s movement. Of all models in this field, the Duluth model is the most well known and has had the most significant impact on the movement to address domestic violence. Virtually everyone who works in the field of domestic violence in the U.S. has heard of the Duluth model and are applies
at least some of its principles to combat domestic violence, whether they are aware of its origins or not.

Many think of the Duluth model in only one aspect – the feminist educational curriculum for the treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence – when in fact, it was intended to be a much larger community response to domestic violence.

The Duluth model is purported to be:

…One of the most promising methodological innovations in the past 20 years for addressing domestic violence… The Duluth model is essentially a macro-level change model that focuses on changing social institutions, not a micro-level change model that focuses on the treatment of batterers… The Duluth model advocates for reforming the criminal justice system response by developing a coordinated community response. Components of a coordinated community response include: pro-arrest or mandatory arrest policies, follow-up support and advocacy for victims, aggressive and prompt prosecution, active monitoring of offender compliance with probation conditions, court mandated participation in batterer intervention programs, strengthening of civil remedies, and monitoring of the system-wide response to domestic violence cases (Shepard, 2005, p. 439).

The above statements from Melanie Shepard come out of the University of Minnesota in Duluth, where the model began, and are therefore subject to the criticism of self-promotion. However, the influence and impact of the Duluth model is undisputed even by outspoken critics of the model (Dutton & Sonkin, 2002; Grauwiler & Mills, 2004).
The Duluth model has been largely successful at creating systemic change and having a broad, sweeping impact. At the highest level, the Duluth model has attempted to address patriarchal social structures by educating the population towards a more egalitarian society and empowering women. At a systemic level, the Duluth model has been influential in reshaping the justice system and other social institutions. At the micro-level, the Duluth model has worked towards holding each perpetrator accountable and keeping each victim safe. However, the Duluth model has created some controversy around its psycho-educational approach which emphasizes “the primary cause of domestic violence as patriarchal ideology and the implicit or explicit societal sanctioning of men’s use of power and control over women” (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004, p. 1027).

*New Times and New Ways of Naming*

In more recent years, with greater awareness, more diverse perspectives, and a changing culture related to traditional marriage relationships, domestic violence has been expanded to include violence in any intimate partner relationship. “In the process of defining domestic violence as a women’s issue, it left behind the parallel needs of male and same-sex victims, as well as children” (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004, p. 50). The term *intimate partner violence* is gaining acceptance as the new label in the literature. It is more inclusive, and new players, not just the battered women’s movement, are shaping the issue. This report will use *intimate partner violence (IPV)* in place of other terms, to reflect the recent changes, to support the diversity of perspectives, and to align this research with a position that advocates for fresh thinking in domestic violence.
The legal term for intimate partner violence, is still *domestic violence*. The legal definition of domestic violence includes, but is limited to physical harm, a threat of physical harm or stalking of an intimate partner. The popular nursery rhyme phrase, *sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me*, may be supported by the legal system’s definition of violence and recidivism research; but victims, perpetrator treatment providers, and victim advocates know that physical violence is not the only form of abuse used by perpetrators against their partners. Many victim advocates use a broader definition for domestic violence and many treatment providers attempt to treat a broader range of abusive behaviors, which include other forms, such as verbal and emotional abuse, or asserting power and control over an individual.

Intervention programs have also changed names over the years. The first interventions were called *batterer treatment programs*. Possibly to communicate a more realistic view of the effectiveness of batterer’s treatment programs, some programs started to be called *batterer intervention programs (BIP)* and, potentially to be more inclusive of other forms of violence, some programs have also been called *perpetrator intervention programs (PIP)*. Each program has its own name and there are many more to pick from, but the three mentioned here are the ones most frequently found in the literature. This report will be using *perpetrator intervention programs (PIPs)* in place of other terms to reflect recent shifts in thinking about such programs.

*Perpetrator Intervention Programs*

In 1994, the battered women’s movement was largely responsible for getting the Violence Against Women Act passed into legislation. This was legislation that included
mandatory-arrest laws that “provided the sanction and resources to place domestic violence on the radar in communities across the nation” (Shepard, 2005, p. 436). Although some states had begun pro-arrest policies before this act, after 1994, law enforcement personnel across the nation were required to make an arrest if they saw signs of abuse. The courts had to figure out what to do with the large increase of individuals charged with domestic violence, and court-mandated treatment, in the form of perpetrator intervention programs, became a popular response. Although there are some exceptions, the typical court ordered response to domestic violence has been the arrest of the perpetrator, a no-contact order to enforce separation of the perpetrator and victim, domestic violence charges with differentiating degrees of severity, and a one-to-two-year probation period that includes 6 months to a year of participation in a perpetrator intervention program.

Within the criminal justice system, the primary objective for perpetrator intervention programs has been to curb domestic violence by keeping the victims safe and holding the perpetrator accountable for his behavior. However, intervention programs went beyond these initial goals, using psycho-education, peer support, and therapeutic techniques to attempt to change the behaviors of the perpetrators. Perpetrator intervention programs were first developed out of the Battered Women’s Movement – by those who first attended to the needs of battered women. Many of the first intervention programs were led by women. The first recorded treatment for men who assaulted their wives, was started by Anne Ganley in the late 1970s, at the Veterans Administration Center in Tacoma, WA (Dutton & Sonkin, 2003). In a 1984 final report, the US Attorney General’s Task Force on Family Violence recommended court-mandated intervention
programs as a substitute for other sentences, and when mandatory arrests began in 1994, a plethora of intervention programs surfaced to meet the new demand.

*State Certification*

Currently, in most states, perpetrator intervention programs require a state certification. In most states, staff in these programs do not need graduate training, or any training in a psychological field of study, but are required to at least receive limited, specialized training on the issues of domestic violence and treatment requirements. For example, in the Washington Administrative code (WAC), the requirement is a bachelors degree, then 60 hours of domestic violence training to become a trainee; and then trainees must acquire 250 hours of supervised experience before they can provide treatment on their own.

*General Structure of Treatment*

Since the 1990s, state standards for perpetrator intervention programs have been developing without the support of empirical research. The general structure of perpetrator intervention programs are weekly, same-gender group meetings. The length of treatment ranges from 12-52 weeks. (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). Using Washington state as an example, perpetrator intervention programs currently require a minimum of 1 year of treatment.

*Treatment Modalities*

For most U.S. states, the certification does not specify a certain modality of treatment. For example, the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) states:
The treatment must focus primarily on ending the violence, holding the perpetrator accountable for his or her violence, and changing his or her behavior. The treatment must be based on nonvictim-blaming strategies and philosophies and shall include education about the individual, family, and cultural dynamics of domestic violence (WAC 26.50.150).

“Nonvictim-blaming strategies and philosophies” (WAC 26.50.150) leaves the modality of treatment open to discretion. Despite this flexibility of treatment modality, two modalities have emerged as the most widely used around the country: The Duluth model and cognitive-behavioral therapy. In actuality, most programs do not adhere strongly to one model or another but use some combination of both (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005). Other treatment modalities have been employed but are not as common. A number of these modalities will be mentioned in the literature review to follow.

Perpetrator Intervention Programs and This Research Study

Perpetrator intervention programs have become the primary structure of change for our current institutional response to intimate partner violence. Any research study focused on change in intimate partner violence must take into account certified perpetrator intervention programs. These programs were a primary focus at the beginning of this study. However, focusing exclusively on certified programs soon became problematic for several reasons. State certification is such a recent process that it limited the number of couples that could be interviewed. Of primary concern was inadvertently eliminating older couples with a wealth of experience, who may have been addressing
intimate partner violence in their relationship, long before certification processes were in place. A historical review shows that certified intervention programs may not be a useful boundary for this study. They have been historically and politically, rather than rationally and scientifically constructed. In addition, many of them are vaguely defined and varied in terms of modality. Although state-certified programs are the current standard, this researcher decided to include other forms of intervention, to enlarge the data set and broaden our understanding.

A Literature Explosion

*Intimate Partner Violence*

Our academic, political, and cultural awareness of intimate partner violence has grown exponentially since 1980. Of the more than 6800 documents of psychological literature linked to the subject of domestic violence in PsychInfo (a primary database for psychological literature), 1161 were written in the 80s, 2057 were written in the 90s, and 3500 in the last six years of the new millennium. Although child abuse has been addressed in the literature since the 1930s, the first articles specifically addressing the issues of battered women did not come out until 1977. According to the PsychInfo database, the first published document linked to the subject of domestic violence was not written until 1980.

The introduction of this topic to the literature in 1980 and its subsequent explosion is best associated with the increasing influence of feminism and the battered women’s movement. In the beginning, research focused primarily on the prevalence and perceptions of intimate partner violence, victims and victim services, and judicial policy
issues and policing, with only minimal focus on perpetrator intervention programs. With the beginning of mandatory-arrest laws in 1994, the number of identified perpetrators increased dramatically and perpetrator intervention programs became the accepted, and later certified, alternative to overcrowding prisons. Since then, perpetrator intervention programs have become a primary subject of research and a huge topic of debate within the research, practitioner, and policy-making community.

_Perpetrator Intervention Programs_

Since participation in perpetrator intervention programs has become a standard sentence for a domestic violence conviction, these programs have received a lot of attention in the literature. Due to the demand, policies for perpetrator intervention programs were adopted without much research (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). Since then, a significant body of research has developed and is addressing many aspects of perpetrator intervention programs. Research has attempted to differentiate perpetrator typologies, to identify predictors of success, to address the attrition problem, to evaluate outcomes of treatment, and to find the best treatment modality.

_Perpetrator Intervention Modalities_

There is debate as to the best model for treatment. The most-employed and the most-researched models are the Duluth model and cognitive-behavioral therapy; but there are other models. Some of the alternative models or techniques found in the literature are: pro-feminist, social-psychology, culture-based programs, narrative therapy, attachment theory, moral development, interpersonal dependency, psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, relationship mutuality, reality/choice theory, residential programs, trans-theoretical
model, power and control, AMEND model, grace therapy, thought field therapy, restorative strengths, shame model, DBT, self-psychology, restorative justice, couples-therapy models, and other mixed-method models each claiming they have a better approach, but none of them having adequate research to show their effectiveness.

In Babcock’s meta-analytic research there were “no differences in effect sizes in comparing the Duluth model with CBT-type interventions” (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004, p. 1043). Most studies of alternative modalities utilize small sample sizes and/or questionable methodology. Babcock et al. (2004) as well as other researchers, suggest that we have not yet found the best treatment for batterers, and therefore, regulating the use of only one model of treatment is not justified.

In addition, intimate partner violence has many complicating factors that are only beginning to be addressed in the literature, such as the frequent coexistence of substance abuse, mental health, immigration issues, sexual assault, child custody, same-sex battering, dating violence, economic issues, cultural issues, and multiple forms of abusive partner control that do not involve physical violence (Wells, 2005).

Perpetrator Intervention Outcome Studies

Dutton and Sonkin stated that “Treatment groups for batterers have been scrutinized more closely than any other treatment form” (Dutton & Sonkin, 2003, p. 3). Over the last 20 years there have been several published reviews of the growing body of research on intimate partner violence interventions (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Rosenfeld, 1992; Saunders, 1996; Tolman & Bennett, 1990). The reviews offer mixed conclusions regarding the effectiveness of court-mandated intervention programs.
Theorists, researchers, and policy makers have questioned the effectiveness of perpetrator intervention programs and the results are so far inconsistent and disappointing. The most recent meta-analyses, by two independent researchers, have brought together the results of the most significant outcome research of perpetrator intervention programs and concluded that treatment is not better or only slightly better than no treatment at all for reducing recidivism. Babcock et al. (2004) examined 22 studies using sound meta-analytic techniques and concluded that “effects due to treatment were in the small range, meaning that the current interventions have a minimal impact on reducing recidivism beyond the effect of being arrested – perpetrator treatment showed only a 12% improvement over correctional treatment with adult prisoners” (p. 1045). Feder and Wilson followed up this meta-analysis, by doing another but with more rigorous acceptance criteria than Babcock et al. (2004). The results were even less promising than Babcock’s, raising serious doubts about the effectiveness of batterer’s treatment (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005). These two studies in particular have most significantly challenged the effectiveness of current perpetrator intervention programs.

*Directions for New Research*

A number of voices have responded and stated their wish for the direction of new research in the field of intimate partner violence.

Those from the Duluth perspective have identified where they think the focus should be for the future of domestic violence research. Melanie Shepard, from Duluth, suggests new areas of focus should include: removing the obstacles that prevent
institutional responses from being more effective in addressing the needs of victims; strengthening uniformity in community response; adapting to differences in culture, regions, and socioeconomic factors; and a better institutional response to intimate partner sexual assault, which goes largely unprosecuted (Shepard, 2005). But her response effectively ignores the recent meta-analytical findings.

Another significant group of researchers believes that intimate partner violence is too broad of a category for one treatment modality. Robert Geffner writes:

It is time that we focus more on alternative approaches that may be effective with certain populations, that we not assume that all offenders are the same, that we move away from a “one size fits all” mentality, and that we begin to emphasize the importance of treatment being based upon an assessment and tailored to the individual needs so that long term changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors can be achieved. (Dutton & Sonkin, 2002, p. xxiii)

Bowen and Gilchrist (2004) also suggested that outcome studies have been too narrowly focused on single behavioral outcomes with little differentiation of psychological characteristics and treatment characteristics that could better tell us what works, for whom and under what circumstances. Addressing issues of domestic violence in New Zealand and Australia, Watson (2001) and Goldner (2001) called for the funding of comparative evaluations of “a multiplicity of approaches to treatment that are thoughtfully conceived and empirically documented” to better understand the complexity of intimate partner violence.

Eckhardt, Murphy, Black, & Suhr, (2006) advocated for better methodology by suggesting that studies of perpetrator treatment effectiveness should adopt the design
strategies that have been successfully used in validating and determine best-practices for psychotherapy treatment of a wide variety of mental health issues.

The Lack of Victim’s Perspective in the Research

A number of researchers have responded by drawing attention to the obvious lack of the victim’s perspective in the current research. “Program evaluation research has predominantly focused on program format, treatment completion, abusive behaviors and attitudes post-program, and has superficially examined female partners’ views on program effectiveness” (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001, p. 297).

Goodman and Epstein (2005) have stated similar thoughts, questioning: How are the real-life contexts of victims’ lives affected by public policy?

Justice reforms have taken the form of relatively inflexible, one-size-fits-all mandatory responses focused on counseling, restraining, and punishing batterers. Even the protection order system relies far more heavily on batterer treatment programs than on victim support to prevent future violence. (Goodman & Epstein, 2005, p. 479)

Goldman and Du Mont (2001) advocate for research to provide richer insight into women’s perceptions of batterer programs. Silvergleid and Mankowski suggest that “future studies on the process of change should obtain corroboration of behavior change, such as reports of wives, partners, or police.” (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006, p. 157).

Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research

Intimate partner violence outcome-research has been primarily quantitative in design. They have focused on recidivism rates of physical violence as the measured
outcome, because it is an easily quantifiable measure. According to recent meta-analysis research, these quantitative studies, based on recidivism rates, indicate that domestic violence intervention programs are not effective or minimally effective (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005).

Recidivism rates provide a limited view of the benefits of intervention programs, since treatment providers and victim advocates are often treating violence, not just as physical violence, but as inclusive of other forms and patterns of abuse. Victims, perpetrator treatment providers, and victim advocates know that physical violence is not the only form of abuse used by perpetrators against their partners. Many victims experience emotional abuse as more harmful than physical forms of violence. (Grauwiler & Mills, 2004; Holzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron & Stuart, 1999). Perpetrator intervention programs address more than issues of physical violence and outcome research should address the full spectrum of abuse and violence that is being treated.

In addition to not including other forms and patterns of abuse, quantitative research tells us little about the quality of the domestic relationship in question and how it has been impacted by intervention programs and victim support services. It may be true that perpetrator intervention programs have little effect on recidivism rates, however, there are likely other outcomes worth noting. What has changed for the perpetrators and their domestic partners and what has affected these changes? Only qualitative research can probe for answers to these kinds of questions.
A Gap in the Research

In summary of the literature review, two primary criticisms have been highlighted. First, researchers have largely ignored the voice of the victims. Second, in the face of inconsistent and disappointing recidivism results, there is a need to return to a qualitative, grounded-theory approach to what is effective change in intimate partner violence.

Who could best tell us about effective change in domestic violence? Some researchers have looked to court records on recidivism, some have asked the perpetrators of the violence following treatment, some have asked the treatment providers, counselors, and psychologist, but few have been attentive to the domestic partner’s views on effective change. It is this researcher’s assumption that effective change, is change that is appreciated by domestic partners who have been addressing intimate partner violence in their relationship.

The perpetrator and their criminal record have been at the center of focus for the researching community. Self-reports from perpetrators have little weight by themselves in determining what is effective treatment, since denial, minimizing, and victim blaming are found to be characteristic behaviors of the accused perpetrator. Researchers and service providers have become critical of the perpetrator’s perspective. They have come to believe that perpetrators can present an incomplete, distorted or self-serving view about their behavior and change process.

It is understandable that, in an attempt to get more reliable information, most researchers have focused on recidivism rates as the primary outcome measure. Although these statistics may tell us something about the effectiveness of batterer treatment, in light
of the less-than-satisfactory results of outcome research, they are telling us very little about effective intervention for perpetrators of intimate partner violence. To get this kind of information, the research community will have to return to a more qualitative discipline of research, where effective aspects of intervention can be fleshed out.

Although self-reports from perpetrators may be tainted by minimization, denial, and victim-blaming, if their experiences were corroborated by another witness of the experience, such as the treatment provider, then the findings would carry more weight. Silvergleid and Courtenay (2006) did just that. They took the extra step, which other researchers have not done, and identified change processes from open-ended interviews with both perpetrators and treatment providers. They have shed significant light on what has been, and can be, effective aspects of perpetrator intervention programs.

The research from Silvergleid and Courtenay (2006) illuminates what has been effective from both perspectives, and at the same time, brings to light the differences in perspective. This kind of grounded-theory research provides valuable information to treatment providers and policy makers, which the large numbers of quantitative studies are unable to provide. Not only do their findings help identify what has been important to the change process of perpetrator intervention, but they also paint a fuller picture of what actually happens and the perspectives that may help or hinder the change process.

Silvergleid and Courtenay (2006) set a great example of helpful qualitative research, and went the extra mile to include multiple perspectives. However, they failed to include a critical informer, as well as a participant, in the change process – the victim. Without a victim’s perspective, they were able to document some changes processes that take place in perpetrator intervention programs, but they were unable to show if these
changes really mattered in a domestic relationship. Only a few studies have tried to collect substantial information from victims about perpetrator intervention programs, and even those studies have only asked superficial questions of the victims (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). It is disappointing to realize that the victims’ perspectives have been largely ignored, creating a huge gap in our understanding of effective change.

This research study continued in the example and direction set forth by Silvergleid and Courtenay (2006), by seeking an in-depth understanding of change processes from multiple perspectives, but this study has identified the point of view of the victim as crucial for understanding effective change. In this study, domestic couples with a history of intimate partner violence were interviewed, giving equal weight to both the perpetrator’s and the victim’s perspective on the perpetrator’s change process. Each had a different perspective to add to the overall understanding. The perpetrators were able to speak about internal changes and the victims were able to be a primary witness to behavioral and relational changes.

The primary difficulty in conducting this research was finding couples who had continued in their domestic relationship after receiving intervention and support services. Finding couples who have continued in their domestic relationship was a strategic part of the research design, because it was the only way to gain an understanding of the perpetrator’s and the victim’s perspective of the full process.

Little research has been done on domestic couples who are still living together after having received intervention and support services for intimate partner violence. At the time of this research study only one dissertation, by Linda Southers (St. Mary’s
University, 1999) was found, which involved in-depth interviews with perpetrators of intimate partner violence and their victims, following intervention services.

There were a number of shortcomings in Southers’ research. One shortcoming was the sample size; only 3 couples fully participated in the research. Another was the timing of the interview; it was conducted immediately following treatment, leaving no understanding of the long-term effects of treatment. The third and most disappointing shortcoming was the interview structure because it was based on a filter for understanding change that greatly limited her findings. Southers research explored, “How former batterers described their experiences of change in relation to the specific content of the violence intervention programs they attended.” (Southers, 1999, p.19). As part of the interview the participants were asked to comment on each topic of the treatment curriculum. As a result, data analysis resulted in content themes which merely confirmed the researcher’s bias towards effective treatment content by suggesting the content in the line of questioning. Although Southers attempted to fill a similar gap, by getting the victim’s perspective, her methodology and sample size weakened her findings.

The intent of this research study has been to look deeply into the change process, by understanding the lived experience of domestic couples (perpetrators and their victims), who have participated in the process from the beginning. It focused on domestic couples, who may have separated for a time period due to intimate partner violence, but at the time of the interview, were still choosing to stay together in a domestic relationship. It was not the intent of this researcher to promote couples staying together as a modality for change. Rather, the study was focused on couples that have continued in a domestic relationship, because it allows for a more in-depth understanding,
in that only intact couples could have a full perspective on the before and after experience of perpetrator change. Interviewing these couples led to a theory about the change process, grounded in the experience of domestic partners who have been through the process together.

_The Lack of Domestic Couple Perspectives in the Literature_

Speculating as to why couples’ perspectives have not been investigated in research led this researcher to the following observations and hypothesis.

When faced with alarming statistics concerning the prevalence of intimate partner violence in America, safety and recidivism are priority issues and other aspects of healthy verses abusive relationships are secondary.

Couples therapy as a treatment for intimate partner violence is contraindicated. Couples therapy is strongly criticized in intimate partner violence literature as dangerous, potentially increasing the domestic violence (Simpson, 2006). In fact, separation of the domestic partners through restraining/no-contact orders and perpetrator treatment are the primary interventions of the justice system. This has created an institutional response with a preference for separation. The focus on safety, separation, and accountability as the flagship priorities of state intervention policy has reinforced, for many practitioners and researchers, the idea that couples should not stay together.

Victim advocates will tell you that there is good reason for this preference. It is often the case that victims will stay in unsafe relationships – unsafe for themselves and for their kids as well - hoping unrealistically that things will get better, with no regard for their safety. Some victim advocates would say that any research study, which gives hope
for couples with a history of intimate partner violence, would add to the false hopes that keep victims committed to their domestic partner.

In addition, agencies that focus on domestic violence are either focused on victim support or perpetrator treatment and very few agencies do them both. The issue of domestic violence tends to divide people and agencies. Therefore, there is little communication between those who advocate for the victims and those who provide perpetrator intervention programs. As a result, there is little focus on treatment/advocacy of couples with a history of intimate partner violence.

There is a small body of research focused on treating intimate partner violence in couples therapy (Almeida & Durkin, 1999; Bograd & Mederos, 1999; Heyman & Schlee, 2003; Simpson, 2006; Stith, McCollum, Rosen, & Locke, 2002; Stith, Rosen, & McCollum, 2003; Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004; Stith, McCollum, Rosen, Locke, & Goldberg, 2005; Tucker, Stith, Howell, McCollum, & Rosen, 2000). But couples therapy has only been reconsidered for milder cases of intimate partner violence, and so far, research has not sufficiently demonstrated that couples therapy is effective at reducing intimate partner violence nor has research shown that it is more effective than other safer treatments. Couples therapy is risky, potentially increasing the violence, and is not supported by treatment providers nor victim advocates who specialize in intimate partner violence. Exploring couples perspectives on change in intimate partner violence may be considered to be too closely associated with couples therapy.

Another predominant factor that may deter research from investigating couples’ perspectives on change in intimate partner violence, is the belief that there are relatively few couples that survive the lengthy intervention process and participants would be hard
to find. Intervention and support services usually do not assume that couples have
successfully addressed intimate partner violence in their relationship, even if they have
survived the process and are still in a relationship. In fact, it is more often assumed that
patterns of abuse leading to intimate partner violence are probably still at play in their
relationship. So, in addition, couples may be afraid to expose their relationship as a
subject for inquiry, and therefore, finding couples willing to talk, would be doubly hard.
It was an extremely difficult to find participants for this research study, which suggests
that this might be true.

These factors have supported an institutional and cultural resistance towards
couples staying together. These speculations bring up important issues. They point to the
controversial appearance of this research study. They give an indication as to how the
results of this study might be received by those in the community who are working
against intimate partner violence.

In light of these concerns, it is important understand the intent of this research
study. It is not the intent of this study to promote couples therapy for intimate partner
violence. This researcher does not intend to influence policy, or services, or victims,
towards keeping domestic couples together in unsafe relationships. Nor is it the intent of
this research study to influence change in the priorities of state policy, nor to change the
state-certified treatment strategy design to stop the violence and enforce firm safety
measures. Through this inquiry into couples with a history of intimate partner violence,
the intent was purely to better understand the nature of change from the domestic
couple’s perspective, which by its nature, must include perpetrator and victim
perspectives of the whole process.
Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is the qualitative method used in this research study. Grounded theory is an empirically-based, theory-generating strategy. Grounded theory is one of the predominant traditions of qualitative research that has its own particular, systematic, empirical method of inquiry. Grounded theory operates under the premise that theory should be “grounded in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people” (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). It has been developed within the field of sociology and was first articulated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Creswell, 1998). Glaser and Strauss have defined grounded theory as a scientific, empirical method of inquiry. Through clearly defining a structural and systematic method, they have opened this approach up to other domains of social science research, including psychology.

The Grounded Theory Method

Research is typically conducted through interviews with individuals or groups. Creswell talks about the data collection and data analysis as a zigzag process – “out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, analyze the data, and so forth” until the categories are saturated with enough detailed information (Creswell, 1998, p. 57).

Data analysis is systematic and structured. The first step is to segment information into initial categories about the phenomenon being studied. This first step is called open coding. The second step is called axial coding wherein the researcher
assembles the categories into a logic diagram showing relationships between categories. The third step is called selective coding, where the research identifies a storyline or systemic understanding that integrates the categories in the axial coding. The systemic understanding can then lead to conditional propositions (or hypotheses).

Creswell (1998, p.58) identified 4 key challenges in producing a grounded theory:

1. Setting aside, as much as possible, preexisting ideas so that the data-grounded-theory can emerge.
2. Following the specific steps of a systematic data analysis despite the evolving ‘zigzag’ process of data collection and analysis.
3. Facing the difficulty of deciding when the categories are saturated.
4. Adhering to prescribed components of grounded theory, the theory must include a central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences.

Key Challenges

To address the key challenges identified by Creswell in producing a grounded theory, attention was given to minimizing suggestive bias in the interview questions and strict adherence to a structured, systematic data analysis, and the prescribed components of grounded theory were maintained. This would “set aside, as much as possible, preexisting theoretical ideas or notions, so that the data-grounded-theory can emerge” (Creswell, 1998, p. 208). The difficulty of grounded theory data analysis is “following the specific steps of a systematic data analysis despite the evolving ‘zigzag’ process of data collection” (Creswell, 1998, p. 208). Despite these efforts, the viewpoint of the
The researcher can still have a significant influence on the results of grounded theory research.

*The Researcher and His Role in Qualitative, Grounded-theory Research*

It is important in grounded theory, that the researcher, as well as the recipient of the research, be well aware of the researcher’s vantage point. For the researcher, it will keep himself in check about his own agendas and it will affect the direction that he takes. For the recipient of the findings, it will put the research in context and shed more light on the nature of the findings. By exposing such information, preconceived ideas, goals, and motives are not kept in the dark and the findings have the potential for more credibility in context.

The primary researcher for this grounded theory project had a unique vantage point. He had already completed a masters of arts in professional counseling and performed this research study as part of his doctoral work in clinical psychology. He completed his doctoral internship with an agency that provided both victim advocacy services and state-certified perpetrator treatment services. This was a unique experience at that time, since no other domestic violence agency specialized in doing both. He received state-certified training in domestic violence and was a qualified domestic violence staff treatment provider at the time of this research. He also provided victim counseling services and community outreach to churches for victim advocacy. He had been involved in services for intimate partner violence for only two years and was still far from being persuaded towards a certain theoretical perspective in regards to the etiology, public policy, treatment, or healing of domestic violence. Due to his training and
experience, he did however look at the issue of intimate partner violence from the perspective of mental health, perpetrator treatment, and victim advocacy. He was open and persuaded towards an in-depth investigation before making any conclusions, however, he had heard of and was intrigued by a variety of theories that were prevalent in this field of study. For perpetrator treatment he was trained in the Duluth model and cognitive-behavioral approaches. As a therapist for individual and group therapy, he was trained in existential and psychodynamic approaches.

According to Glaser and Strauss, the success of grounded theory is dependent on a number of factors, but as concerns the researcher himself, success is dependent on his “insightfulness” (1967, p. 251) and “theoretical sensitivity” (1967, p. 46).

Insight can come before, during, or after data collecting. The researcher must work as a highly sensitized and systematic agent. These adjectives can be translated as follows: the researcher has insights, and he can make the most of them through systematic comparative analyses (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 251).

This researcher felt that his experience put him in an ideal position for insight and theoretical sensitivity, since he had some experience and yet he was still formulating his opinions about the field of intimate partner violence.

Rather than being concerned solely with recidivism, which is so prevalent in treatment outcome research, he was more interested in the relational and psychological impact of a broader definition of intimate partner violence. He also did not want to limit the research study to a narrow focus on stopping physically violent behavior, but he wanted to understand the psychological and relational impact of behavioral change, as
well as to investigate the potential for, and process of, relational healing and recovery from a history of intimate partner violence.

Due to the recent meta-analysis research findings and his own experience with perpetrator intervention programs, he held significant doubts about the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions as a whole. He was hopeful that in these interviews, he would find some stories to indicate that real change and healing from intimate partner violence was possible, and that change was experienced by both parties in the relationship. He was also hopeful towards the possibility of documenting a well-grounded theory of the process of change from the domestic couple’s perspective.

The fact that the researcher was a male is important to consider when investigating an issue like intimate partner violence which is significantly gender-polarized. It may create doubts that a male could sufficiently represent the victim’s perspective, which in this study is a female perspective, and in intimate partner violence as a whole, is primarily a female perspective. In counter balance, it is also important to note that the dissertation committee that guided this research was entirely a female committee which represented significant experience in victim advocacy, feminist theory and a women’s viewpoints. They kept the researcher aware of his male viewpoint throughout the process.

Because it turned out that all of the participants claimed to be protestant Christians, it is also important to understand the researcher’s perspective on the Christian faith and Christian culture as it relates to intimate partner violence. The researcher grew up in the same faith tradition as the participants and claims Christianity as his own faith. When the participants spoke from a Christian worldview, used Christian language, and
Christian metaphors; he understood the participants as an insider. He also was keenly aware of how certain Christian religious beliefs can provide a context for fostering intimate partner violence. Before entering into this study, one belief in particular had captured his attention as specifically damaging to the cause against intimate partner violence. It was the belief, commonly held by Bible-believing Christians, that the man is the head of the household and the woman must submit to his authority. It is not universally accepted, and is not interpreted in the same way by all practitioners of this faith, but it has probably done the most damage by facilitating contexts where intimate partner violence can flourish. Although the researcher has been interested in promoting a healthier Christian response to intimate partner violence, for this research study, he was not at all interested in theorizing a particularly Christian-oriented model of change. In fact, when he had come to the end of his search for more participants and realized that all of his participating couples were devout protestant Christians, he was sorely disappointed. He had made a concerted effort to find participants with other worldviews, but in the end it was only Christian-oriented intervention providers and Christian-oriented couples who responded with participation in this study. One can speculate that maybe the researcher’s ability to connect with this particular demographic gives the primary reason for such a one-sided response. But equally plausible is the possibility that the Christian worldview of marriage uniquely encourages couples to engage in the process of change together despite the risks and challenges. “This is not surprising given that their theoretical world-view centers around the notion of transformation. Reconciliation is at the heart of the [Christian] gospel message” (Nason-Clark, 1996, p. 526). Neither thought
can be ignored; both have the potential to have influenced this group of participants to participate.
Research Method

In this research study, seven domestic couples were interviewed for the purpose of developing a model of perpetrator change based on the couple’s perspective. The participants were heterosexual couples who were in a domestic relationship at the time of the interview. They had a history together that included intimate partner violence, intervention, and support services. For all of the couples, the man was identified as the primary aggressor of intimate partner violence and the focused subject of change. The woman was considered the primary witness of behavioral and relational change, and sometimes acted as an agent affecting the man’s change. Evidence of the women’s change also surfaced during the interviews but was not the focus of this study.

Purpose

This research study had two objectives: (1) to obtain perpetrator and victim accounts of the process of intervention and change; and (2) to develop from these accounts a grounded theory of the process of change.
Research Questions

The following were the basic questions that guided the research study. These questions were not the interview questions themselves, but are better understood to be the questions that led to the data collection method and the questions that guided the data analysis.

- What can be learned from domestic partners who have participated in intimate partner violence, participated in intervention services, and are still living together?
- From the perpetrator’s and victim’s perspective:
- What has essentially changed?
- What are the significant factors that have contributed to change?
- What were the key elements in the process of change?
- What are the implications for intimate partner violence policy and service providers?

Finding participants

The first attempt to finding participants was facilitated through the network of Washington state domestic violence treatment providers. There were 143 domestic violence treatment providers on the list of certified programs for 2007. Each address on the list received a mailing in October 2007 informing them about the study and asking them to consider if any of their former domestic violence clients might still be in a domestic relationship with their partner. They were asked if they would be willing to make an initial contact with their clients to see if they would be willing to receive an
information packet about the research study. Nine of the letters were returned by the postal service stating that the address listed was an unknown address. It has thus been assumed, that 134 agencies in the state of Washington received the letter. In addition, the proposal for the research study was presented at the Northwest Association of Domestic Violence Treatment Providers (NWADVTP) annual conference a week later; a significant percentage of Washington state treatment providers attended the conference, as well as some providers from other northwestern U.S. states and British Columbia. The proposal generated a fair amount of interest and about 14 solid leads were made with treatment providers that were serious about contacting former clients to participate in the study. Follow-up emails and phone calls were made with these 14 providers to facilitate contacting and informing candidates about the research and asking if they would be willing to participate. Information packets were mailed out to 53 potential candidates. The number of couples who responded as willing participants was 6, and 5 of these passed the screening criteria.

After exhausting the avenue of asking treatment providers to help find participants, the researcher, still wanting to find a few more couples, put an ad in a local paper for a month and on Craigslist for a month inviting couples who have “overcome domestic violence in their relationship” to share their experience for this research study. An image of the ad can be found in Appendix D. The ad generated two calls that ended up being two leads which did not meet the screening criteria. Only two women called in and expressed a willingness to be interviewed, but their male partners declined to participate.
Still wanting to find more participants, the research then decided to contact couples counselors using a snowball approach. He contacted 18 marriage counselors and pastoral counselors who see couples, to ask if any of their current or former clients fit the description of the couples I was looking for. Only 3 of the counselors said yes. From these leads, 2 more couples were found that met the screening criteria.

After nine months of searching, no new effort was made to generate more participation in the research project. The researcher settled on 7 couples (14 people) to be the research participants for this study.

Finding participants was a significant challenge and a significant finding, in and of itself. It gives us an indication of how rare this experience is and/or how difficult it is for couples to come forth and talk about their experiences. Several treatment providers were surprised by their clients’ unwillingness to participate. A couple of treatment providers asked their clients why, and they commented that there was too much shame and their clients didn’t want to “stir the pot” again, despite the treatment providers’ belief that their marriage relationship was a success story worth telling.

Selection Method

After a candidate was identified, the treatment provider or counselor made the initial contact to ask if their client would be interested in receiving an information packet about the study. The information packet included an invitation to participate, two consent forms, two screening questionnaires, and two return envelopes. Each of these items are described in more detail in following sections and samples are included in Appendix A, B, and C. Each individual needed to fill out, sign, and send back one of the consent forms.
and questionnaires using one of the return envelopes. If the candidates agreed to participate as indicated by mailing in the consent form, a telephone screening was scheduled to verify that they meet the inclusion criteria for the study and to assess their ability to articulate their experience. Details about the screening interview are also described in the following sections.

*The Information Packet*

*Invitation Letter*

The invitation letter briefly described the purpose of the study, why they were contacted, what would be expected of them and how to fill out the forms and mail them back. A sample of the invitation letter is located in Appendix A.

*Consent Form*

Consent forms, one for each person, were included in the information packet that was sent to each candidate. Each potential participant signed an informed consent which adequately described the purpose of the study, the procedure, the risks, the benefits, and their right to accept or decline involvement at any time. The signed consent form was mailed to the researcher with the screening questionnaire, before the screening phone call was made. A sample consent form can be found in Appendix B.

*Screening Questionnaire*

Screening questionnaires, one for each person, were included in the information packet and asked for basic demographic information as well as basic questions about their relationship and intervention services. It also asked for the date of the most recent
incident of physical violence and their willingness and sense of safety talking about their
history of violence with their partner present. A sample questionnaire form can be found
in Appendix C.

*Return Envelopes*

Return envelopes, one for each person, were included in the information packet.
Each person in the couple was instructed to fill out their forms in private and to mail their
forms separately from those of their partners.

*Screening Requirements*

The screening had two parts, written and verbal, and verified that the volunteers
were domestic partners who:

- have experienced/participated in domestic violence in their relationship,
- have participated in intervention and support services specifically
  addressing domestic violence
- were still living together in a domestic relationship
- had no incidents of physical violence or threats of physical violence in the
  last year
- felt safe talking about their experience together, were willing to talk about
  it, and could adequately describe it.

*Screening Method*

Screening questionnaires, one for each individual, were included in the
information packet. The screening questionnaire addressed all of the screening criteria as
well as important demographic information. Each individual separately filled out and mailed in the screening questionnaire, along with their individually signed informed consent. Verification was made, that the screening questionnaires were mailed separately and that their information matched their partner’s information. After verification, the screening interview was scheduled.

A telephone screening interview was made with each individual privately, before a domestic couple was accepted into the study. The telephone screening interview reviewed the items in the screening questionnaire. It also assessed their sense of safety and comfort talking about domestic violence with their partner present, and assessed their ability to adequately describe their experience. If both individuals met the criteria, felt safe, and could express themselves, then the couple was accepted and an in-person interview was scheduled.

*Interview Method*

The question of whether to interview the couples together as a couple, or separately as individuals, was debated at length during the interview design phase. The choice was made to interview the couples together as a first priority. One might have concluded that interviewing each individual separately would provide more information, since one partner might not feel free to talk about certain things with their partner present. This is based on the assumption that their may be many secrets between the couple due to safety concerns. However, interviewing the couples together enabled the researcher to get a better understanding of the culture, comfort and respect of their relationship, by experiencing how they interacted with each other, as they spoke about their history
together. Interviewing the couples together provided more information than interviewing them separately, because the interviewer could capture each person’s immediate response to their partner’s response. The interviewer could see who spoke more or who controlled the conversation and how one person would respond to the perspective or experience of the other. It also had the benefit of getting an immediate, dual perspective of each event being described. By interviewing them together, each partner would feed off of the other, carrying the interview process with less direction (and potentially, less influence) from the interviewer.

All of the individuals were asked privately in the screening phone call if they felt safe to talk freely about their history with intimate partner violence with their partner present. One couple was interviewed together as well as separately because they felt like they had some things to say separately that would be easier to talk about without the other present. None of the others expressed that need or made that request. The interviewer felt that, although interviewing each partner separately could have provided some information that may not have surfaced through interviewing them as couples, interviewing them together proved to be far more valuable for understanding their relationship.

The interview was semi-structured. It led the participants to tell the story of their relationship through the intervention process. They were asked to describe their relationship and major events before, during, and after participating in some form of intervention for the man’s intimate partner violence. They were told that the purpose of this research study was to get their perspective on what had changed and what has contributed to those changes, with a primary focus on the man’s change process. They
were asked to talk about what they think had changed and to identify what they think contributed to the change. Questions were open-ended and designed to elicit more information without being suggestive or biasing the response, except to focus primarily on the man’s change. Standard questions were:

- Tell me about you life together, in the early part of your marriage, before you started to seriously address issues of intimate partner violence with outside help.
- Tell me about what happened that led you to get help.
- Tell me what was happening for you and for your relationship during this next period in your relationship, after you began to get help.
- Tell me about your life together in your most recent time together.
- Over the (# of) years of your relationship, what has changed? What has changed for him? What has changed for her? What has changed in your relationship? What else changed?
- Describe the process of change.
- What do you think contributed to that change? What else has contributed to change?
- What do you think has not changed or still needs to change? What seems to be the roadblock?
- What advice would you give another couple who is facing issues of intimate partner violence in their relationship?

To elicit more information at any time the interviewer asked questions such as:

- Tell me more about __(something the interviewee has already stated)__
Can you give me an example of ___(something the interviewee has already stated)___

Is there anything else?

To elicit more information from the partner who is not speaking the interviewer asked:

- How did you experience ___(something their partner has already stated)___
- What is your perspective on ___(something their partner has already stated)___

To return to the purpose of the interview, if the couple was getting off track the interviewer said:

- In the interest of time, I would like to change direction a bit and ask you another question.

When the focus ended up drifting towards the woman’s change process, then they were gently redirect to talk more about the man’s change process by saying something like, “So what was changing for him?”.

Each interview lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours, depending on how much the couple had to say. Cumulatively, 14 hours of interview data were collected.

Audio-recording and Data Transcription

The interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. The digital recordings were given to a professional transcriber and they were transcribed verbatim,
including all disfluencies, into word documents. Cumulatively, 300 pages of transcription data were collected from these interviews.

Data Protection Method

Any information provided in the interviews, if not specifically identified otherwise by a written release of information, was treated as confidential according to University Guidelines, and the data has been kept secure and will be destroyed after all requirements for the data are met.

All data were kept in the principal researcher’s possession or locked/password-protected. Interview recordings were labeled using a coding system and names and biographical information were kept separate from interview data. A confidentiality agreement was made with the professional transcriber, who also holds to standards of confidentiality for her profession. She was not given the names of the participants nor any information not necessary for completing her tasks. After completing her transcriptions, the transcriber deleted all of her transcription records. Any reports or presentations, showing the results of this research, have not and will not include participant names or any personal information that could uniquely identify any participants. Some potentially identifying descriptions of people or events were modified in this report to disguise the identity of participants. Any modifications that were made to protect the identity of a participant were done in such a manner so as to not have any bearing on the credibility of the research findings. The scope of this research project required that only the principal researcher and the professional transcriber needed to listen to or see the interview data. Audio recordings have not been listened to by others
and will not be shown to others unless permitted by the participant, through written release of information. The participants understood this policy and the procedures of confidentiality.

Data Analysis and the Emergence of a Model

The transcriptions were analyzed according to the grounded theory method. They were imported into QSR NVivo software to facilitate the data analysis. The analysis was centered on the phenomenon of change. The back-and-forth process of grounded-theory culminated in a 5-stage model of change. The first step in the analysis process was to identify all of the things that had actually changed from the couples’ perspective; 330 descriptions of change were identified. Simultaneously, a constant comparison was made between each descriptions of change that was being coded, and categories of change started to form. At this point, changes were grouped in categories such as attitudes, thinking, behavior, perception, understanding, awareness, values, feelings, safety, relational, etc. The second step involved identifying the elements that were identified by the couples as having caused or contributed to change - 130 descriptions of contributing factors were identified. The participants also spoke frequently with broad statements about the change process. These were helpful in identifying links between elements in the change process - 123 descriptions of the change process were also identified.

While sorting the elements which were contributing to change and evaluating links in the change process, three phases of change started to emerge. Trying to link these three phases with the initial categories of change became frustrating. There was little congruency between these groupings, and the data analysis seemed to have come to a
halt. An attempt was made to regroup the 130 descriptions of change into new categories, hoping to find more congruency with the three phases of change. New categories started to form, such as: changes in relation to self, changes in relation to others, becoming safe, working on relationship, beliefs, and behaviors. In addition, a number of these categories started to show depth, as if each had developmental stages. For instance, changes-in-relationship-to-self had sub-groupings that could be seen as stages of development; changes in awareness, changes in self-mastery, peace with self and changes in self-confidence. A concept of five developmental stages emerged from these new change categories and the three phases. These five stages became the first hint at a basic structure for the model that was developing.

Based on this five stage structure, the analysis of the data deepened and three domains of change started to emerge (self, other, and relationship) and each had specific developmental tasks for each stage. Relationships between each stage (seen as vertical relationships in the model) and between each domain (seen as horizontal relationships in the model) started to emerge and fortify the strength of the model.

The 130 elements that contributing to change fit neatly into two categories, external intervention and internal attitude. Each category had unique requirements for each stage. The model was then tested individually against each couple’s experience and narrative. It was possible to place each couple at different stages in the model, depending on how far they had come. At the time of the interview, two of the couples were identified as being in the fifth stage of the model, four couples were still in stage 4, and the two others were out of synchrony and struggling with relational work (normally stage 4) without the man having completed sufficient individual work (normal to stages 2 and
3). The model that emerged from these interviews is represented in the figure at the beginning of the section labeled findings, where each stage is described in more detail.

The Participants

The couples that participated in this study came from a variety of different sources and different backgrounds. Three of the men had been through a state-certified treatment program as one of the primary interventions. Two had been through an intervention program that existed before the implementation of state-certification. This intervention program involved both partners receiving treatment but in separate gender-specific groups. The two remaining men received what seemed to be competent professional counseling for issues of intimate partner violence, but not in an established program specializing in intimate partner violence.

The collective years of experience in this group of participants was 362 years of domestic relationship, and 124 years of personal experience addressing change in intimate partner violence. The length of time in a domestic relationship, ranged from 12 to 36 years with an average of 25 years (12, 17, 23, 29, 31, 33, and 36 years). The length of time addressing change in intimate partner violence, ranged from 2 to 20 years with an average of 9 years (2, 2, 3, 4, 13, 20, and 20 years).

The types of physical violence that these men inflicted on their partner ranged from.

- Throwing things – near her and at her – cups, plates, phones, etc.
- Using hands and feet – slapping, pushing, shaking, punching, hitting, and kicking
• Hitting with objects – a stick, small furniture
• Entrapment – trapping her behind closed doors, holding her down
• Spanking adult partner – hitting her multiple times on the bottom with a hand or a belt as punishment
• Child abuse – beating children, choking son, or physical fights with children
• Sexual abuse – pressuring, insisting, or forcing sexual activity
• Threats – threats to kill, threats of suicide, pointing a gun at her
• Stalking – chasing her or tracking her down

The men lived many different walks of life and had different issues to deal with. One did skilled labor until he was unable to work due to a neck injury and became depressed and angry. Another learned violence by growing up in a gang-infested neighborhood. Another had a large ego and was unapologetically chauvinistic. Another was fairly antisocial and could not hold a job because he had trouble with people. Another always had to position himself above others, always had to be in charge, and always needed to have the power. Another learned from his father that the angry man always got his way. Another insisted on being the head of the household, and demanded respect and a sense of order through rigid rules and compliance.

Three of the men ran their own businesses. Three were leaders in Christian ministry. Three of the men had bachelor’s degrees or higher. Four of the men had A.A. degrees or lower.

The participating couples were diverse in their experiences. In contrast, there were some major commonalities that could not be attributed to the screening criteria; nor
could these commonalities be fully attributed to the selection process. All of the couples were in their 40s and 50s. One of the couples was African-American; all of the others were Caucasian. For one of the couples, both partners had previous marriages; all of the others were in their first marriage. One of the couples did not have kids together; all of the others had more than one child. None of the couples spoke about coexisting issues with substance abuse that could have been contributing to violent behavior.

*Devout Protestant Christian Couples*

It was not the intent of this study to focus on a specific religious group. However, it turned out that all of the research participants were devout protestant Christians. All of the couples considered their Christian faith to be an important aspect of their lives and central to their reasons for continuing in their marriage after a history of intimate partner violence.

*Couple #1*

The first couple was in their 50s and had been married 12 years at the time of the interview. This was not his first marriage, nor was it her first marriage. They had no children together and no children living with them, but they both had children from previous marriages who were living elsewhere. It was 2 years before the interview when the man seriously began to address his angry, violent, and controlling behavior through a state-certified intervention program.

He has had a recognized “anger problem” since the day they met. After 10 years of marriage they had a verbal fight that escalated to throwing things and culminating in him throwing an object at her, hitting her in the head. She was bleeding and he took her
into the emergency room where she was stitched up and he was arrested.

They were separated for 2 years with a no-contact order issued by the court. He went through DV treatment for more than a year and she got counseling and community support through their local church. After two years, they attempted to live together again, and had been back together for 1.5 years at the time of the interview. He made significant changes in anger and violence, but at the time of the interview, she was still very dissatisfied with his lack of participation and lack of communication in the marriage.

Couple #2

The second couple was African American and the only couple in the study who represented a minority group. They were in their 40s and had been married 10 years at the time of the interview. They had been living together on-and-off for 7 years prior to getting married and dated on-and-off for 7 years prior to that. They had 5 children together and he had 3 other children from other relationships. It had been 20 years since he began to seriously address his violent and controlling behavior through a state certified treatment program.

Violence was a way of life for this man. He had grown up in a poor and gang-infested neighborhood. He had fought many men and beaten many women in his earlier years. He even held people at gunpoint. For him women were “bitches;” and for her men were to be used for “sex and money.” When they started their relationship they did not know how to treat each other with respect or how to communicate; they did not even know to desire or expect such things in their relationship.

They separated many times during the course of their relationship. He was in and
out of jail and “shacking up” with other girls on numerous occasions. Among other offenses and charges, he was arrested for domestic violence and was required to take domestic violence treatment. During a time of separation, she volunteered at a YMCA and learned about domestic violence. They later decided to live together again, but this time with the knowledge they had gained about intimate partner violence. Over time, his violence shifted from physical abuse, to verbal abuse, and then to other forms of controlling/intimidating behavior. He was still controlling and intimidating when they decided to live together the last time, but he had a “fear of God” in him that if he didn’t work things out with his wife, God was going kill him. They lived under the same roof, but in separate bedrooms for a while. She began to show him how he was behaving and how it was impacting her. He decided to listen. He began to let her have impact and have influence on him.

They showed a lot of respect for each other in the interview. They still argue a lot but “it is not like it use to be.” She expressed that he has become very safe. She said she is not afraid to confront him and felt comfortable talking about the abuse. He says endearingly that she is a strong woman and he is in awe of her.

Couple #3

The third couple was in their 50s and had been married 31 years at the time of the interview. They had three children. It had been 2 years since he began to seriously address his anger, violence, and controlling behavior through a state-certified intervention program.

Seven years before the interview, he had a work-related injury that left him with
chronic pain and the inability to continue his work. He started taking pain medications.
His wife said his personality started changing; he became depressed, irritated, angry and
controlling. She insisted that he was not like this for the first 24 years of marriage.

For the 7 years after his injury, as he escalated in negative behavior, she insisted
that he get help, but he wouldn’t do anything about it. Things escalated until he got into a
fight with his son. As a result, his wife told him to leave and issued a no-contact order
against him in an effort to force him to get help. They were separated for 9 months before
he agreed to attend a state certified intervention program. After 3 to 4 months of
treatment, he moved back in with his wife and children and after a year completed DV
treatment. They blamed the injury, job loss, and the potential side effects of pain
medication for his behavior. Yet, they saw DV treatment providing necessary
accountability and helpful tools for managing his behavior. They were finding it hard to
understand and accept that it was natural and easy for him to manage his anger before,
but now it is something he struggles with and has to work at with diligence.

Couple #4

The fourth couple was in their 40s and had been married 23 years at the time of
the interview. They had three teenaged children. It was 13 years before the interview that
he seriously began to address his angry, violent, and controlling behavior through a
program specifically addressing intimate partner violence.

He was mostly verbally and emotionally abusive with a few incidents of physical
violence, sexual abuse, and child abuse. She started going to counseling after several
years of their marriage and later separated for a few months. They took a couple of short
weekend classes that taught them a few things about intimate partner violence. Things got a little better and she moved back in with him. Several years later things had worsened to the point where she separated again and they both entered into a gender-segregated group-counseling treatment program for intimate partner violence where both partners participated. The program they went through involved three phases (1. domestic violence class, 2. gender-segregated groups, 3. couples counseling). They participated in the program for more than a year. About six years later she separated again for a few months, because he had been physically abusive with one of the children.

It has been 8 years since the last incident of physical abuse, with his child. There have been significant improvements in his verbal and emotional abuse, but it does continue to happen from time to time. She says significant progress has been made, but she would like to see more progress in reducing the frequency of verbal attacks that can still surface when he gets angry.

Couple #5:

The fifth couple was in their late 50s and had been married 36 years at the time of the interview. They had adult kids and had recently become empty-nesters. It was 20 years before the interview that he seriously began to address his angry, violent, and controlling behavior through the same three-phase intervention program as the previous couple.

He had an anger problem with explosive behavior since before they were married. He used his anger to control and intimidate people. From time to time he would use holding, grabbing, slapping, or pushing as a means to control his wife. Early in their
marriage, they went to church leadership for help with his anger. The church leadership was concerned and tried to help, but was not helpful due to a “lack of understanding” and, as a consequence, ultimately enabled his abusive treatment of her for many years. After 16 years of explosive, violent behavior and deterioration of the marriage, they sought treatment and participated for two years in a three-phase intervention program (DV class, gender-segregated groups, and then couples therapy).

The two years in this intervention program was only the beginning. His last incident of physical violence was before this intervention program, but the real change they talked about, happened during the ten years that followed treatment, while they were in their 40s. They participated in many forms of counseling during those years, and talked about it as a time of tremendous personal growth. She said the years that followed, the last 10 years while they were in their fifties, have been really good years for their relationship.

_Couple #6:_

The sixth couple was in their 50s and had been married 29 year at the time of the interview. It had been 4 years since he began to seriously address his violent and controlling behavior through professional counseling and 3 years since she separated from him.

He was a controlling and intimidating man in his work and personal relationships. The most violent episode occurred in the first year of their marriage when he teased her, she slapped him, and he gave her a brutal spanking/beating to let her know who was boss. This set the tone for their marriage and he never used that kind of violence again.
However, there were frequently other episodes of physical violence – like slapping, pushing, and hitting.

They attempted to get help through several marriage seminars and counselors along the way. These did not help and, in fact, according to the woman, made things worse. She learned about DV through a victim’s support group and eventually got the courage to leave him. During this time of separation, he began to realize the effects of his own behavior and was able to make some changes with the assistance of a pastoral counselor, a church men’s accountability group, and a support group for adult children of alcoholics.

After about a year of separation with no-contact, they started to meet at public places like fast-food restaurants or coffee shops and after another year they tried living together again. In hind-sight she felt like she may have moved back in too early, however, when he was attending his accountability and support groups, things were pretty good at home. If he was not attending them, things were usually not so good. He showed remorse and deep regret for his controlling and violent behavior in their relationship and she felt he was showing more consideration for the needs of others. She also felt like she was being treated with more equality. He was starting to treat her with more respect and they were starting to make more decisions together. He was able to “look at his own stuff” and recognize more quickly when he was being abusive and that was creating hope for her that they were making progress.
Couple #7:

The seventh couple was in their 50s and had been married 33 years at the time of the interview. They had 5 kids and were almost empty-nesters. It had been 3 years since he began to seriously address his violent and controlling behavior through a professional counselor.

He was controlling since the beginning of the marriage, rigid and rule-oriented in his parenting, and had many angry episodes. He slapped his wife on several occasions, once giving her a black eye. His most violent event was hitting her in the head with a stick. He also got into physical fights with his children. He had a couple of affairs during the marriage and tried some counseling after the second affair, because she insisted on it, but this counseling did not last and did not seem to have much impact. After 30 years of marriage, he found a counselor that he liked and continued to see for 3 years. In his counseling, he focused on the underlying issues behind his anger, controlling behavior, and affairs.

One year before the interview, she told him that she was going to leave him. Since then, he has been nicer and more considerate and it sounded like she wanted to stay and give him a chance as long as this good behavior continued. Of all the couples interviewed this man seemed to have made the least progress down the road of change. It was also the only couple that did not have a period of separation.
Findings

The back-and-forth, data analysis process of grounded-theory culminated in a 5-stage model of the change process. The model has been named the Change Model of Intimate Partner Violence (CMIPV) and describes the perpetrators change process. It is a model that was developed out of the experiences of seven couples and incorporates both victim and perpetrator perspectives on perpetrator change.

The first step in the data analysis process was categorizing what had actually changed from the couples’ perspective. The second step involved identifying the elements that contributed to that change. In short, assimilating this information led to a logical progression of 5 stages of change that form the basic structure of the model.

Based on this 5-stage structure, three domains of change started to emerge (self, other, and relational) and there were specific developmental tasks for each stage. Relationships between each stage (seen as vertical relationships in the model) and between each domain (seen as horizontal relationships in the model) started to emerge and reinforce the model.

Elements contributing to change fit neatly into two categories (external intervention and internal attitude) and there were unique requirements for each stage. It was possible to identify each couple as at different stages in the model depending on how far they had come. At the time of the interview, two of the couples were identified as being in the fifth stage of the model, four couples were still in stage 4, and the two others were out of sync and struggling with attempting relational work (normally stage 4) without the man completing sufficient individual work (stages 2 and 3). The model is
represented in the following figure and each stage is described in more detail in the sections that follow. The CMIPv focuses on the perpetrator’s change process and is best understood in terms of positive, effective change. That is to say, according to these couples, if positive, effective change occurred, this was the process by which it occurred.
Overview of the CMIPV

Before going into detail about each stage and each domain of the model, it is important to get a bird’s eye view of three overarching themes that are crucial to understand the model. First, change is seen as a process, not an event. Second, a driving force is required to propel a person through the change process. Third, even though these couples were still committed to each other in a domestic relationship, it is important to recognize that separation has been a critical part of the process, for the purpose of both physically and psychologically separation.
Change as a Process

The overwhelming feeling one gets from listening to these couples speak about change is that it is a long process. This model that emerged from the data is not a time-dependent model; it is not dependent on time spent in counseling, nor the length of time married, nor the length of time separated. However, some understanding of time puts this model in perspective. Of the seven couples who were interviewed, two couples progressed farther down the road of change, fully arriving at the 5th stage of the model. Both of their journeys through all 5 stages took approximately 20 years. The other couples felt that they were still in the process, that they had made significant progress after several years (1.5, 2, 3, 4, and 13) but still had a ways to go. Just the work to gain enough personal awareness and understanding took more than a year for all of the men. For many of the men the process of gaining personal awareness continued for many years. Most commented that they were still learning new things about themselves at the time of the interview and that it was a life-long process.

Most of these couples would probably also say that the process did not feel as linear as the model suggests, because, in actuality, the process was described as taking “one step forward, two steps back, three steps forward and two steps back.” This is due to the fact that the 5-stage model that emerged, describes the process of positive change, and does not describe in full, and with all possible variations, the process when there is, for example: a setback, regression, a roadblock, or when one stage is attempted out of order – like when relational work is attempted before individual work has achieved adequate progress. In these situations, if the men did not do enough personal work first, it became clear that the couple struggled more during the stages of relational work. Some
couples reverted to a period of separation and individual work, if they came to realize that they were not ready or were not safe. Some women regretted stepping into relational work too early. In general, couples needed to return to earlier stages and ensure completion of that stage, before continuing in relational work, even if another period of separation was needed.

In addition, the process often felt rather cyclical, because the couple would repeat this model with each new issue of control/abuse that they confronted. For several couples, the progression of behavioral change had distinct phases. They went from stopping physical abuse, to stopping verbal abuse, to stopping other forms of control, to nurturing individual freedom. Each phase required a different level of awareness. As one of the men put it, “You can’t change anything unless you see it first.” In reality, this model was often repeated or reinitiated with each new level of awareness.

*A Driving Force is Required*

One wonders, what drove these couples to stay in the long process of change through continued setbacks and even continued violence? All of the participants shared the same sentiment about this question, but one of the couples stated it the most succinctly. The man said, “We both believe in God and we both are committed, and those are really two of the biggest things that I can say.” His wife also responded in kind, declaring, “What keeps me going, is family and God.” All of the participants spoke about their Christian faith as an important and integral part of their lives. Their Christian worldview and belief system provided a context and a driving force for the stages of change that followed.
For all of the couples, being a part of Christian culture strongly influenced them to staying committed to the relationship. Some of the participants, only after much suffering, considered divorce as an option, but it created an internal conflict with their belief system. Divorce would come at great cost to their social identity and was a great challenge to their religious identity. They avoided it at almost all costs. The one couple, where both partners had the experience of being divorced in previous marriages, had come to the following conclusion. The woman said, “We don’t believe in divorce. You shouldn’t be in a violent situation, in which case you get separated, but a divorce is not going to help anybody. You don’t get a second chance really, because all you do is take more baggage into another time around. And so, if you’re going to be married, you might as well fix what you got instead of starting over again, because it just really doesn’t work. It’s not helpful.” Another woman said she felt abandoned by most of her Christian community when she separated and began pursuing a divorce. One couple, who believe that in the end, it was worth sticking it out together, held a particular view about the divorce rate in America saying, “Things are way too disposable today.” Another spoke about her feeling of obligation, “I felt responsibility to him as a person. I spent my whole life with him. I felt he was sick. I felt he had some kind of breakdown.” One of the men spoke about his own motivation to work at it, saying, “If you’re going to see it through, see it through. You know, do whatever it takes to do it. If you want this marriage to last, work on it. It’s a day-to-day work.”

Many of them, the men and the women, also stayed in the process for the sake of their kids. One woman looked back on the result of staying together and was convinced that she had made the right decision for her kids, “I’ve seen so much with people with
broken homes, friends, just people that we’ve known over the years, the single parents, men single parents, women single parents, the issues and the problems that they’ve had with their kids in growing up. We stayed together, okay? It’s not been perfect, it hasn’t been ideal, but we stayed together. Even though there’s dysfunction there with my kids, I still see healthier, more balanced individuals than I see with other kids.”

A significant driving force was the primary beliefs and commitments which kept these couples involved in the change process. One can speculate that this model may be applicable to couples with different beliefs and commitments, but progression through this model required some kind of driving force to keep the person engaged in the process.

The change model that emerged is not considered to be a Christian model requiring a Christian worldview. However, the stage model that has emerged from these couples’ experiences, most certainly requires a driving force that keeps the person and the couple on the journey. For this group of participants, the driving force was their beliefs and commitments which were part of their Christian worldview. For couples who do not share the same worldview, it has been hypothesized that the model may still apply. A sufficient driving force would be required, but it could easily be based on other beliefs or commitments.

*The Critical Step of Separation*

Separation was a critical intervention for the beginning stages of the change process, and for several couples, separation happened multiple times.

For all of these couples, the first stage of the model began when the woman or an external authority (law enforcement, community leader, counselor, or committed friend)
made a decisive move to separate the couple, or made an authoritative threat of separation if the man did not immediately seek help and significant changes did not start to occur. In some cases, the first stage followed one of the most significant events of violence in their relationship; initiating the separation and the first stage of change. In some cases the first stage began when the woman finally reached a point where she felt ready, safe enough, and secure enough to enact a separation strategy; this is because some women needed time to prepare themselves and plan their course of action carefully, to avoid a violent event, because they intuitively feared a violent reaction from their partners.

A relationship began to emerge between the length and conditions of separation and the effectiveness of the individual work that took place in the first two stages of change. For example the partner of the woman, who only threatened separation, made the least significant changes and had advanced the shortest distance through the five-stage change process. The man with the shortest separation had two incidents, where his wife separated from him for 3 months. In this second case, the woman was more accommodating and accepting of his behavior and, at the time of the interview, verbal abuse was continuing to be tolerated and still having an impact on her and the children. All of the other participants had separations lasting for more than a year. All of the participants, men and women, saw the time of separation (and, in one case, the threat of separation) as an important stage in the change process. There was no certainty during this time of separation as to the future of their relationship. This uncertainty seemed to be a critical to the change process. A guaranteed period of separation may not have created the same context for change.
Some of the men said that their thinking about domestic violence and their behavior had been changing before the separation. They could see a problem. They were making some effort to change, and some were even going to counseling for their behavior. However, long-term change without separation was not evident to these men’s partners and individual effort or counseling was having little to no impact on their relationship. A couple of the women did see some short term change without separation, when the men were attending a support/accountability group and were behaving better; but when the support was gone, the behavior got worse again.

One man talked about their separation in this way: “The real formative change and the most significant changes were after she had filed for divorce and moved out. So that’s when I’m all alone… over a year. It was the pain of the experience of her filing for divorce and moving out, that catapulted me into: Now I really have to do this. Now I have to face this reality. Before, I was sort of working at it, not really effectively, I guess. And then I realized: Okay, more than just the physical violence was, ‘What is going on in my heart, deep down, that I have to have the dominance, and the power, and the control?’… Because the violence was pretty widespread, but the control and the power was regular throughout the day.”
**Stage 1: Wake-up and Listen**

Stage 1 is where the man is confronted with relational consequences and is hopefully able to wake up to the problem and begin to listen.

*External Intervention for Stage 1: Separation and Confrontation*

External pressure was required for all of these men to enter the change process. It took separation or a threat of separation that communicated something to the effect of: “I (we) are not going to take it anymore. I (we) are not going to accept it anymore. Something has to change or there is no possibility for the relationship to continue.”

None of the men made real significant changes without external pressure. In every case, the man was not able to help himself on his own accord. They tried, but were unsuccessful in making really significant changes. They had to be forced into the process of change, or feel the effects of personal painful consequences, in order to really make changes, because empathy for the impact they were having on their partners was not enough. It may have been enough to feel sorry for their behavior, but not enough to make behavioral changes.
Internal Attitude for Stage 1: Open to Listening

Following the point of separation, an initial response was required from the man, for him to continue down the process of change. The event needed to grab his attention. The attitude needed an expression such as: “Ok, I am listening now, I thought I was listening before, but now I am really listening.” A couple of the men did not get to this attitude right away. One man gave advice, based on his own mistakes, to other men who may find themselves in the same situation, “get help as soon as you can, and if someone’s telling you that you need the help, understand that they’re not against you. Because with me, I waited a long time.” It was 9 months, after he was asked to leave, before he sought help and it still wasn’t all on his own, he felt pressured into it. Another said “I fired about six or seven counselors before I really realized that the counselor was there to bring truth and not to side with my opinions in how life was.”

The Changes of Stage 1: Wake-up and Listen

At this earliest point in the process, change was realizing that things couldn’t continue the way they were; it was realizing that there was a problem that needed to be taken seriously. The men became open to getting help or, at least, they were willing to follow through on the requirement of treatment or counseling. One man described the law enforcement process and his decision-making after getting arrested for hurting his wife:

“There’s a process. Within the first eight hours, there are certain things you have to do. Within the first 72 hours there are certain things you have to do. And I had made up my mind that that’s what I was going to do. I had made up my mind that we weren’t getting divorced because of my stupidity. So that meant that I was going to have to do
whatever the court ordered me to do to resolve this situation: probation, reporting in every month, going to counseling every week, group and individual.”
Stage 2: Gaining Awareness and Understanding

Stage 2 was the beginning of the individual work that set the stage for relational change. It was the stage where new awareness and understanding happened.

External Intervention for Stage 2: Teaching and Confrontation.

Separation was critical to the beginning of individual work. The men needed to not only separate physically, but be able to separate emotionally also, so that they could take a good look at themselves. At the beginning of the change process, all of the men had a tendency toward externalizing their problems; they were blaming others for their problems and attempting to control others to manage their own fears. They lacked a sense of responsibility for their own way of being. Some were also too emotionally enmeshed to separate their issues from those of their partner’s.

A couple of men stated that, although they resisted separation at first, they came to feel that being in relationship with their partners at that time would not have been a safe place for them to be vulnerable enough to explore what they were doing and what was going wrong for them internally. All of the men spoke about the significant impact that the time of separation had on their thinking. The domestic relationship had too much
chaos and was too intense a place to start sorting out what was going wrong for them personally.

Stage 2 required a lot of teaching and counseling to gain awareness and understanding. All of the couples in this study got a significant amount of counseling. One man had just one year of DV counseling, but for all the others in the study, counseling lasted for many years and took many different forms, with many different counselors: DV counseling, individual counseling, pastoral counseling, family systems counseling, and couples counseling. In all of these cases the women also received an extensive amount of counseling that mostly focused on healing, learning how to protect themselves, and learning how to respond powerfully and constructively to their partners explosive, controlling, and/or abusive behavior.

This stage also required confronting the man’s attempts to deny or avoid taking a good look at himself. All of the men talked about multiple experiences of confrontation. For many of them, the experience of being confronted by more sources than their partner was important to the change process. They could no longer blame their partner, if they were getting the same feedback about their behavior from multiple sources. It also was important for some of them to hear the same feedback from a man, because they could no longer say that what they were hearing was only a woman’s perspective.

*Internal Attitude for Stage 2: Seeking to Understand*

Gaining understanding and awareness was influenced by the man’s willingness to listen and his desire to learn and understand. Most of the men talked at length about their lack of awareness before entering stage 2. They said that they were not aware of the
impact they were having on others and were not aware of what was going on inside them. To enter fully into stage 2, the men had to have the attitude of a learner. They had to be teachable.

One of the women described her man as “a learner.” “That’s one of the things I really respect about him. There are not many men who are learners. Most of them, what you see is what you get. And that’s who they are and they have no intention of changing at all. He has changed a great deal. People who knew him before he was married and know him now know that he’s changed a great deal.”

The men who progressed the farthest down the road of change, also showed the strongest desire to learn. After 20 years of being in the process, one man described it as, “You’re constantly learning. You’re constantly having to deal with it.”

*The Change Progression in Stage 2: Gaining Awareness and Understanding*

For the most part, changes in awareness and understanding followed a progression from (1) gaining knowledge, (2) to stopping blaming others, (3) to making it personal, (4) to looking deeper.

**GAINING KNOWLEDGE AND STOPPING BLAMING OTHERS**

The more these men were able to understand behavior, the more they were able to separate one person’s behavior from another’s behavior. The more they were able to identify individual intentions that lead to certain behavior, the more they were able to stop blaming others for their own behavior.

One man referred to how knowledge broke down the tendency to blame others. “We didn’t have the knowledge before. We didn’t have the knowledge about why we
were doing what we were doing. And we were ignorant. We were just emotionally ignorant. Ignorance produces very toxic behaviors, and destructive behaviors, so we were blaming each other. It was gaining that knowledge and information that it wasn’t somebody else’s fault; I had to be personally responsible for my own behavior. Knowledge began to produce understanding.”

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

These men needed to take what they were learning and make it personal. They had to take what they were learning and ask themselves, does this ring true for me. One of the men remembered when he first saw a power-and-control wheel. The power-and-control wheel is a common tool used by counselors and advocates in the field of domestic violence. It illustrates 8 different strategies for exerting coercive control over your domestic partner without using physical violence (threats, intimidation, verbal abuse, isolation, economic control, male privilege, using the children, minimizing, denying and blaming). He took this information and started to make it personal when he said,

“Going through the power-and-control wheel, I thought, ‘Oh, boy, I do some of those things.’ So when my wife might have been thinking ‘He didn’t get it,’ actually, I did get it. I was just stuck in: ‘Now what do I do with this?’ And my thinking was beginning to change, but it wasn’t fully changed.”

**LOOKING DEEPER**

The men began to look at the underlying causes of their behavior. One man stated new beliefs about his behavior. He came to adopt these beliefs as his own through counseling. He described the process of taking what he was learning about his behavior
and looking deeper. He identified underlying feelings and the history of his behavior.

“There’s a reason why there’s a reaction or an instinctual rage, wanting to get pissed. There are feelings and stuff going on underneath … to be able to identify what’s going on and addressing that instead of exploding… because there are behaviors that have been entrenched and established for a long time.”

UNDERSTANDING AND EMBRACING THE PROCESS

Several men had the insight to see that future stages of change were dependent on this first step. They believed that changes in understanding and awareness were required before a response could happen. As one of them put it, “you’ve got to have a little bit of knowledge, education, information, under your belt in order to start shifting on the inside. There’s an internal shift that happens and it’s a process, it’s an important part of the process.”

The Changes of Stage 2: Gaining Awareness and Understanding

Changes in awareness and understanding happened in three domains: (1) becoming more self-aware and self-understanding, (2) challenging your perception of others (primarily her), and (3) gaining more awareness and sensitivity towards the relational impact and influence that you are having on others and they are having on you.

RELATIONAL IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

The first step of growing awareness and understanding was listening to others. Listening opened the door to being influenced by others and had an impact on the change process at many levels. It permitted the men to seek help and consider what they had to
say. They started to listen: to counselors, to friends and family, to other men in DV
treatment groups, to their partners and to their kids. They began to open up and at least
consider other perspectives. They began to respond to others rather than write them off.
They began to seek to know what others think. They were willing to see and accept other
people’s feelings. They were open to hearing what needed to change. They were willing
to listen to suggestions about how to do things differently. They followed through on
recommendations, trying things that others suggested even if they were not convinced.

From this listening perspective, they began to accept feedback from others about
the kind of impact they were having. They started to consider how they made other
people feel. They started to see the fear that they inflicted on others. One realized that he
was often intimidating people. One saw that his behavior was driving people away and no
one wanted to be with him anymore. Others were able to hear about the devastation,
destruction, and hurt they caused their wife and kids. Some began to observe others more
and recognize signs of their impact on others (i.e. facial expressions, nervousness,
backing away, cowering, hiding, depression, rebellion, retaliation). One man was specific
about asking, “What did I just do that made you respond that way?”

Another man recognized how important it was that others experience his change;
that change is not relational change unless, “it is evident to other people, especially my
wife… and that takes time, time not just to bring about the change, but then time for
people around me to recognize that as well.”

BECOMING MORE SELF-AWARE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING

In stage 2, the men were learning a lot about themselves. All of the men talked
about growing self-awareness and understanding in a number of different relevant areas, there was a lot of overlap between areas of understanding, and yet each tended to emphasize different aspects of the following changes in awareness.

The men started recognizing that they were focused more on others’ behavior than their own and that they were blaming others for their problems. They began to open the door to looking at their own issues. They began to understand the dynamics of power-and-control, what controlling tactics they used, and what were the intentions behind the tactics.

They recognized their lack of care for how they were treating their partners. They began to recognize chauvinistic thinking. Their sense of right and wrong became less egocentric as they were able to hear an outside perspective and were able to look at their behavior from outside themselves. They began to distinguish right from wrong without justifying wrong behavior by the behaviors of others.

They got to know their triggers for emotional reaction and identify their emotional hot buttons. They began to pay attention to themselves in the moment and to recognize when their tension was rising. They came to know that they don’t have to react to, or retaliate for, what others might be doing around them or to them. They began to understand why they tend to react the way they do.

They started recognizing their longings, recognizing the wounds that they carry, and their underlying fears. They came to understand their desire for control. They recognized their intentions and their strategies, to protect themselves and try to fulfill there longings. They came to understand where their strategies were flawed and how these flawed strategies were not going to create the kind of relationship that they were
longing for.

One man clearly brought together the influence of emotions, intentions, and control on his behavior and confessed that his strategy did not produce the results he really wanted. “Anger was my method of communication. Body language, quietness, sternness, that’s how I can control the conversations. If somebody’s not doing what I want them to do, my way of handling it was to become quite intense, very serious, you know. I felt that that’s the way I had to do it to get people’s attention, and so I’ve had – I’ve learned over the years that was inappropriate. It caused people to stand back. Yeah, they did what I wanted to do, but they did it out of fear. They didn’t do it because they wanted to do it. And I did that with my family too.”

CHALLENGING THEIR PERCEPTION OF OTHERS

All of these men had distorted perceptions of their partners. Several men saw their partners as a threat to their wellbeing. One said he saw her as “an enemy and not a friend.” Another saw his partner as a manipulator. Another saw her as “second class” due to chauvinistic thinking. Another saw her as lazy, but did not take into account how he was exhausting her with his behavior. Another saw her as quiet, with little thought and little to say, not realizing that he never gave her space to talk or the freedom to share her own opinion.

As these perceptions began to be challenged, as the men were open to the possibility of misperception, the idea that their partners may be different than they thought began to grow. It was fascinating to see how their perceptions changed and to listen to them speak about it.
The man who saw his wife as the enemy came to realize: “I was treating her the way I would an enemy and not a friend. And when I put it in that perspective, you just don’t go beating up on your friends for the hell of it. And so, when she gets that look, I remember: She’s my friend. She’s upset about something. And she’s always told me the truth. She hasn’t gone around my back. I haven’t had somebody come to me and tell me a different story or anything like that. She has always been right on the mark. So I had to stop the self talk that was being destructive. It’s self-destructive and it’s destructive to the relationship. How I view her, how I view other people, it puts it all – the relationship, our marriage, in a whole different light and that’s very important, very key to whatever comes after that.”

The man who saw his wife as a manipulator, saw his wife’s tears as her attempt to control him and he would not let her emotions have an impact on him. Later, He was able to see those tears differently. “When she would cry, I would think: You’re just trying to manipulate this with tears. I couldn’t hear her tears. I do now.” During the time of separation, He reflected on her emotional moments and believed that he “missed her heart” for most of their married life.

The man who outright said he was a male chauvinistic pig, went from seeing his partner as the inferior gender to appreciating, in her, qualities that he did not have: “She was like a second-class citizen and I treated her as such, and I had to get past that. She was more my equal and eventually even my better half, because a lot of this wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for her pushing me along.”

Another man, rather than thinking his family was against him, came to realize that they were trying to help him: “I was feeling that my family didn’t understand me and
what I was going through. That was what I was thinking, but it wasn’t true, because I was getting support from my family.”

A couple of the men really thought they knew their partners’ character, but realized that their partners where not quiet, or lazy. In fact, their partners were suffering the effects of their abuse.

“I accused her of being lazy a lot, and things of that nature, but she was worn out because of me, and I couldn’t see that, though. I look back on that and I was totally blinded to what I was doing and why she was just physically worn out emotionally. I mean, you can’t – you can’t live under that kind of abuse and maintain your life, you know. When I was gone, it was her time to just collapse and recuperate, you know.”

In the middle of the interview, one of the men expressed amazement toward the changes he was seeing in his spouse since she began to heal from the abuse and “began to see herself as a real person”:

“I’m sitting here and listening to my wife talking to you and I’m in awe… You would probably think she talks a lot. But she has always been really quiet. This was a very secluded, quiet person that you’re talking to. I mean, she speaks for herself now. I mean, she’s a powerful woman… (and in endearing jest he adds) and I stay out of her way.”

Completing Stage 2: Awareness and Understanding is Only the Beginning

The growth of awareness and understanding that happened in stage 2 became the knowledge and understanding these men needed in order to respond differently if they so chose. They needed to understand these elements of their life and behavior in order to
take a hard look, to feel the impact of their reality, and to decide on what they wanted to change. But knowledge and understanding were not enough for behavioral change, an internal shift needed to happen and following this internal shift, lots of individual and relational work would still be required.
**Stage 3: Caring and Responding**

In stage 3 these men transitioned from gaining awareness and understanding to letting it impact them and attempting to do something about it. The marker for arriving at Stage 3 was described in terms of a critical internal shift.

**Internal Attitude for Stage 3: An Internal Shift, Desiring to Change**

All of these men talked about some form of internal shift that happened. The internal shift was an essential ingredient of stage 3. The internal shift had a mysterious, spiritual quality for these men. It was describe in terms of the worldview and meaning system that they embraced. All of the men that were interviewed had a Christian worldview, and most of these men understood this internal shift as spiritually significant and expressed it in terms of their faith. In many cases, their partners witnessed a change in attitude that they could associate with this internal shift. Whether these beliefs created the context for an internal shift, or whether the meaning of the internal shift was understood in terms of Christian beliefs, it could be argued either way. However, it is more likely that both are true as each shaped the other in a dialectic of meaning.

One man said the shift happened when he stopped trying to get his needs met
through his wife and started to cultivate an individual spiritual life, a daily communion with God, to meet his emotional needs. His wife said that after she said she was leaving and he began to “spend time with God everyday,” then she began to experience more freedom from him.

One man emotionally reached the end of himself and called out to God and other men in his church for help. “I was losing everything then, not just my wife and my kids: My career. We would lose our home. Everything I had. In my heart and mind I realized I didn’t have control anymore, that as smart as I was and as smooth of a talker as I could be, I couldn’t fix this one… and my heart was broken at that point. I was a broken man. And I just had to pour my heart out to God and said, I cannot, I can’t fix me. God, I need you to change my heart because I cannot do this myself… But beyond just the realization then, it was working with other men at church, who themselves were broken men and could share their journey… as they could just talk about their broken places, then I could do the same. And that was the key itself, to be able to put words to my broken past, my sin, and to realize I was safe to do that. And then I realized there was a way out of this. And a lot of them, as they shared their hearts, I could hear that, and I realized I could be safe with people and I could talk like they talked.”

One man talked about the internal shift as an epiphany that came from a dream which he had while they were separated. In the dream, he was in hell with the devil and God rescued him from hell saying, “Who are you not to love your wife with everything you have and give her everything when I gave my only son, Jesus, to die for you.” He then called her and said “I don’t want anything. You can have it all.” He explained himself in the interview. “I was just willing. That was unconditional love to me. It’s like,
okay, everything in this world really doesn’t matter. It’s the family, it’s the bond, it’s the relationship in the big picture.”

Another man during the separation wanted to run away from the relationship but truly believed he heard from God. If he did not go back to his wife and learn to love her well, then God was going to kill him. That’s when he began to pursue her again but this time he had a new attitude, and she experienced him as more willing to listen.

Another man came to his wife, and performed a Christian ceremonial washing of her feet, as a symbol to show honor to her and humble himself. It communicated his intent to serve and care for her. She described her experience of the moment in this way:

“I was just stunned. He asked me to forgive him… that he was so wrong.

Because he always says: ‘You know, you always do the right thing, you always do the good thing, you’re always forgiving, and I hated you for that because I couldn’t do that.’

And he washed my feet and I’m just like, not even wanting to be there. It was embarrassing. But all of a sudden, all the anger and all the shame that he was feeling was gone. Suddenly for the first time he was humble… I knew then, that if we had the right tools to work with, I knew we could turn it around… if it hadn’t been for that turning point… because it was so deep and beyond whom he had been for so long.” She went on to describe a lengthy process of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that slowly diminished over time and was still going on to some degree, but this internal shift was a clear marker in the process for both of them. After this shift, it was common for the men to return to old patterns frequently, and the women often experienced a Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde cycling of their partner’s behavior.

The internal shift was often a profound and dramatic experience with a lot of
meaning associated with it. When it happened, it may have been momentarily interpreted by the man, or the woman, as the cure, the change that was needed. It created a lot of hope. The internal shift was a critical step, but it was just one step. These couples were still at an early stage in the change process and there was a lot of work still to follow.

*External Intervention for Stage 3: Support Responsible & Accountable Behavior*

Separation was still critical to this stage, since any awareness and understanding these men may have gained at this point, had not yet been transformed into behavioral or relational change. It was still not safe for a domestic relationship. Many of the women felt they stepped back into a domestic relationship too early. A domestic relationship was still too intense. The potential for violence was still the same as before, even if an internal shift was taking place in the man. It was also important, to the men’s internal change process for them to stay separated; the men still needed space to find the will to change and experiment with a new way of being. At this point in the process, without further individual work, one of the women said it the best. “We basically had kind of enough information to be dangerous. We went on for a few years and fell apart again and went back to old behaviors.” Another woman after being separated for more than a year thought, “In retrospect, I think we should have continued to work on the relationship while living apart, maybe until our son finished school.”

During this stage, when the men began to make an internal shift, teaching and confrontation were no longer the key external driving forces. What was more important was strong support for a level of responsibility that they were able to internalize and strong support for a level of accountability that they were willing to embrace. In addition,
they needed a safe place to be vulnerable, admit faults, and try out new ways of being in relationship. As they began to take personal responsibility for their behavior and for the change process, they needed to be encouraged to stay on that journey, rather than be robbed of the potential for that to grow. Those who intervened in their lives needed to recognize this shift and be able to shift as well, to encourage self-motivation, self-discovery, self efficacy and self-correction.

One of the signs of the internal shift was that, most of these men, rather than resisting confrontation, invited it, even asked for it. They longed for someone to take them seriously, someone to stand in their way, when they were being bullheaded. They began to respect healthy confrontation as feedback, and appreciated it when it happened and, more often than before, felt like it was for their own good. They wanted to grow and change, so they sought confrontation on their own.

One of the men spoke highly of a friend who threatened to take his family away from him, if he didn’t stop behaving that way. He looked back on that event and said, he would have done the same as his friend. As a church leader in his community, he said he supports separating families in danger and has confronted men in the same way as his friend.

Another man said he did two years of domestic violence treatment, but that it was several years later, when he began to experience and embrace “real accountability” in his church, that he began to make the biggest changes.

Another man valued his men’s group because it was a safe place to speak about “his brokenness” and it became “the key” to unlocking the door to feeling trapped in his marriage relationship. His wife, after thinking she may have moved back in too early said
the men’s group was her saving grace.

“When he’s meeting with men in the church and going to those groups on a regular basis, things are really pretty smooth. When he’s missed a meeting, or, you know, hasn’t gone to anything in a week or two, it starts to get really tense… one time things got out of hand between him and our son and he went to talk to his men’s group, the men in his life, about what he did, and they told him… ‘Wow!’ They told him, he ‘had rocks in his head!’ That, you know, ‘what was more important, the money or the relationship?’ And so, you know, people say. ‘Well, your husband goes to a group from 3 hours every weekend.’ and I’m like, ‘No, that’s not a problem. You know, it’s a good thing. I’m really happy for that!’”

*The Changes of Stage 3: Caring and Responding.*

During and following the internal shift the men started to care and respond to their new awareness and understanding. Again this took place in the three domains – self, other, and relationship. (1) Relationally, they began to care more about their impact on others. Because they cared, (2) they began to make an effort to master their own behavior. As they began to be more open to their own internal world with their own wounds, weaknesses, and faults; (3) they also were able to be more open, tolerant, and accepting of others.

**CHANGE IN SELF EFFICACY**

As they began to care more about the impact that their behavior was having on themselves and others, they began to better master their own behavior based on the awareness and understanding they gained in stage 2.
They stopped focusing on others and blaming others. One man said, “We really need to focus on ourselves, not on our wives. You know, it’s easy to make it about them.” They had to let go of their pride and defensiveness. One man said, “That was part of my problem, male pride. The pride gets in the way. The defensiveness gets in the way. All that other stuff just gets in the way of an open relationship with my wife.” Then they started to take responsibility for what they were doing. One of the men said, “It was realizing that what I did was what ‘I’ did. I wasn’t thinking that way before. I couldn’t hold anyone else responsible or blame them for my actions.” They felt convicted about their behavior and started to admit where they were wrong. Some said they “regretted it,” “felt they had crossed the line,” and confessed that they “had not been behaving the way they wanted to.” Instead of minimizing their behavior, they start to accept, own, and embrace language that was truer but more difficult to say, such as, “I beat her.” “I abused my wife,” or “I had to accept and come to my own conclusion that I had abusive behaviors.” They started to expand their ownership of these behaviors, not as isolated incidents, but as a way of being and the language shifted to phrases like, “I was always condemning.” “I was a male chauvinist pig.” “I have issues.” or “I am an angry man.” They pushed past male stereotypes, faced their fears, and embraced the emotional roots of their behavior. One man became vulnerable with his emotions during the interview and said, “I feel it as I’m telling you now. And I’m glad to feel that. I’m not ashamed of even getting teary about that. That’s okay with me. Before, that would have bothered me actually, and that’s all part of the internal stuff going on, like somehow I’m not a man if I feel emotional. And I am a man and I do feel emotional for my wife.” Another man said, “I intellectualize it all very well, but getting it up here [in the head] and making it happen
here [in the heart] is sometimes two different things. And that’s where some of the
process is that I have to be willing… I’ve cried more in the last two, three years than I
have my entire life. And that’s part of the growth… in that being okay, that that doesn’t
make me any less of a man.”

They became more self-aware in the moment and could recognize when their
“emotional hot buttons” were pushed and when their “tension was rising.” They began to
think before reacting, retaliating, or acting out. One of the women said, “If he does get
nervous or defensive, right away I just think he’s going to explode, because before I
knew it was going to be a vigil, a rage. And now I’m feeling a lot more safe that he’ll
catch himself and that we will talk.”

They began to face their fears and found less of a need to control others, as one
man put it “Violence was just the way to have power and control. Power and control was
necessary to feel safe in the relationship. I still have moments of fear like that, not just
with my wife, but with people at work. Not all the time, much less, but often enough that
I know I still have a problem inside. Say somebody puts an expectation on me that I can’t
meet, or somebody is upset and I can’t control it, that turns into either fight this – you
know, crush it, get rid of it, or run away from it. That still operates within me. I feel that
a lot. Less, but still, often enough that I know that I’m not completely healed there. This
is where the journey with the men in my life has been helpful, because as they talk about:
Oh, this is your issue. Oh, I can walk into that. I can say that. And, you know, the sting
of the shame goes away. The power of the control of those problems then really falls
apart. It just breaks down.”
CHANGE IN OPENNESS, TOLERANCE AND ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

As these men began to open up to themselves, people became less threatening, and as people became less threatening, these men began to open up to others. They began to accept differences in others. They mentioned accepting different opinions, different emotions, different reactions, different interests, different priorities, different perspectives, different qualities and different personalities. One man stated that, “One of the big things is accepting that, it’s my opinion, it's not hers. It doesn't make her wrong or me right or vice versa.” Some started to become more considerate of other people’s opinions. Another man said he started to “…allow others their space to have their opinion without trying to bulldog them into my way of thinking.” They didn’t have to be right all the time. One man came to that point of saying, “I don’t need to win the argument anymore. It’s not even about that. I don’t care. It’s just about getting to this place where I move toward her heart, whatever is causing that. And the time apart really brought me to that place, where I realized that’s really the most important thing to me. Not winning an argument, not having control.”

Some started to become more interested in what other people were thinking. Some started to be more accommodating to other people’s wishes. Some started to become more sensitive to other people’s needs. Some were less self-centered and started to include other people more. Some started to serve their partners more or were more available to help others with things that were not inherently important to them. One man stated, “She likes me to serve her and do things for her. That's important to her. That's like not important to me. But if that's important for her, then I'll do that.” Some men
began to give up on trying to change things and make things happen. Some men began to soften and became less rigid. Some of the men became more accepting of things they did not like. One man admitted “I don't like her smoking, okay. But me beating a dead horse isn't going to make her stop, is it? So I kind of just accept some of those things about her more. And it makes my life a lot easier because now I don't stress about that.”

As the men began to open-up and be more accepting of themselves and others, their partners said changes started to happen. Some saw that their partners began to listen more rather than dominate conversations. Some saw that they could let go of things that bothered them easier than before. Some men had to work on being able to accept others for who they were rather than who they need them to be. They were less demanding of their partners and their partners felt freer to be themselves or do what they wanted. One woman said, “He's a little more easygoing. If I don't meet his expectations, I think maybe he's going to say something, but I'll see him kind of back off a little bit.”

As they were more accepting of their own faults and frailties, they were more accepting of the faults and frailties of others. In general, they were more easygoing and able to contain their frustrations.

CONCERN FOR RELATIONAL IMPACT

The men who started to shift began to be concerned about the impact they were having on others. One woman said, “Lately, he's started caring about what other people think, and so he will shape things around the direction that makes him look good, which he never used to do.” Although it made him less genuine at first, it was a sign that he was changing as he began to consider how he was being perceived.
The shift led to concern, which led to some initial changes in the way these men related with other people. Some of the men became concerned about the way they come across. It helped for them to understand that it wasn’t just their partners who were affected by their behavior. One of the men said, “I’m very direct and that is a problem. I've had to really cool down from that, with both my coworkers and other people.” Their concern also led to wanting to change the way they to relate to their partners. For example, one of the men realized, “I need to be speaking to her softly, more softly, more considerately of her.” And another woman commented that, “He's able to know when to say stuff and when not to say stuff.”

The men started to listen more, be more attentive to others, and make more changes. One man caught himself in this process. “She has told me from time to time, ‘I can't be who you want me to be’…And so I've stopped.”[after turning to look at her, he shifted and said], I think I've stopped…I'm learning to not demand her to be who she isn't.” And his partners began to experience some small indications of these changes. “He was putting so much pressure on me, to where I felt like I had to perform. I had to meet needs, and try to take care of the kids, and keep him happy and all. I think he has seen that now.”

Concern, as it is understood in this context, should not be interpreted as empathy, but involves a capacity for empathy and a sense of responsibility. Empathy for someone can be felt without a sense of responsibility, and responsibility for ones actions can be felt without a sense of empathy for those affected. Concern, as it is understood in this context, is the emotional response to merging empathy and responsibility. For some of the men, this concern led to grief. One man mourned, “I still grieve over that time period, because
I think of what was lost in the hurt that I inflicted on my family…there's no reason why
my children and her had to go through what they went through because of my actions and
my attitude.”

*The Women Were Growing and Changing As Well*

This study did not focus on an exhaustive understanding of the changes going on
for the women in these couples, except to understand how their changes might have
contributed to the changes going on for the men. Significant changes happened for the
women as well and these changes had a significant impact on the relational work that
would come later. Most of these women did a fair amount of counseling leading up to
separation and during the period of separation. They worked through a lot of issues of
abuse from their current relationship, as well as from past relationships. They grew their
sense of power and self worth. They grew in their understanding of intimate partner
violence and power-and-control in relationships. They grew in their ability to set
boundaries and firm limits. There was only one of the women who did not speak about
these kinds of changes for herself and she was also the one who never did separate from
her husband. The change that she made was coming to the realization that she really
could separate if she wanted to.

During stage 3, some of the changes going on in the men started to show outward
signs that were visible to their partners. As their partners started to see some signs of
change, they had some new hope and were willing to take some risk and start to relate
more to their partners. However, these were not the only reasons that some of these
women stepped back into a relationship with their partner. Some of the women felt
pressured into giving the men a second chance, due to community pressure, or financial pressure, or both. Some found it difficult to leave entirely because of the kids. Some worked to drop the no-contact order enforced by the legal authorities. Some attempted living together without much of a transitional period, and some took it cautiously, with an incremental plan to test safety and trust along the way, leading up to living together again but with safeguards. This last method seemed to have a lot of merit, because these couples seemed to have more security and stability in the process. These changes led to stage 4 and the beginning of relational work.
Figure 5: Stage 4 of CMIPV

Stage 4: Becoming Safe in Relationship

In stage 4, the couples began the hard work of moving towards learning how to be safe in domestic relationship. Before this stage, during the individual work, positive changes were taking place that had a relational effect. However, living together with their partner increased the intensity of relational struggle. Applying themselves again to a domestic situation was the next step in the change process. Only two of the couples that were interviewed had successfully completed this stage. Most of the couples that were interviewed were still in the hard work of moving toward safety and security in domestic relationship. It involved working through and adjusting toward a new relational dynamic, which often included a shift in power. At the same time it involved healing from the history of abuse.

Before this stage began, some signs of change needed to be evident to them before any of the women were willing to reengage with their partners. This was a very difficult issue for the women. And often it took a lot of time to sort out. How were they to know if real change was happening? Signs of the internal shift were far more influential than behavioral changes that had no link to an internal shift. This kind of change was
recognized more as a change of attitude or heart. A change in behavior alone led to questioning whether this was change that came from and internal shift or a change in behavior just to get what he wanted.

A couple of the women had unique situations, but still supported the theory that some change was needed before the women were willing to reengage. For instance, the woman who did not separate from her husband, she still was not willing to continue in a domestic relationship if she did not see changes. For one of the other women, it was not just about what was changing but what was not changing. She was committed to the relationship and was not deterred by fear (although she probably should have been). She quickened the process of getting him back in the home again due to his financial irresponsibility after two years of separation. She believed she could hold him more accountable than others were doing.

This stage was a period when both partners needed to put into action all that they had learned during their time apart. This was a period characterized by domestic living with many failures, but much less severe consequences than before, that is to say, rare and less severe events of physical violence, less verbal abuse, and less controlling behavior. The men had an increased ability to learn from each failure. If the men could not listen to their partner, accept another point of view, make some changes based on this feedback, and learn from their mistakes then this stage was unproductive and they needed to return to individual work. Otherwise, productive change meant that their behavior slowly decreased in volatility, the more they learned from each event. The women experienced a slow increase of peacefulness in the home. And for both partners, mutual enjoyment increased if they were successful in completing this stage. For the two
couples who had successfully completed this stage, the process took many years. For those who were still working at this stage the volatility was decreasing but the concept of emotional-relational safety that they were looking for was still not a predominate feature of their relationship.

The data analysis led to a definition of safety which is a relational understanding of what it meant to be safe in domestic relationship. For these couples in this stage, safety goes far beyond eliminating physical violence. Safety was understood by these couples to have the following elements. (1) safe to confront - safe to address problems and tell the truth without defensiveness or retaliation, (2) safe to be vulnerable - safe to show weakness and struggles without ridicule or taking advantage, (3) safe to be different - think and feel differently without criticism, (4) safe to be disappointed or cause disappointment, without someone feeling threatened or running away.

External Intervention for Stage 4: Hold Him Accountable, Forgive Cautiously.

In order for the men to learn how to be safe in domestic relationship, they needed someone to step into domestic relationship with them and give them honest feedback. This required an initial step of arriving at a relationship where their partners felt safe enough to give this kind of feedback. It often required community support, as well, to hold them accountable and help the women be safe, feel safe, and be supported through the process. On woman was grateful for having outside support that she could trust. She said,

“He wasn’t accountable to me. If I felt I needed to, I had someone I could go to and say, ‘He’s lost it. I can’t fix this. You need to talk to him and make him
knock it off because what he’s doing is inappropriate,’ and he just despised the fact that I could have that phone call. He needed it, he just did not like it at all. I think it was important for me to never use it as a weapon, but he needed to be always aware that this behavior isn’t going to happen unless he chooses it, but he can’t have a life with me and our family and do these certain behaviors because I can’t live like that. I choose not to and I’m not going to, you know.”

The men needed to learn, moment by moment, what their presence felt like to their partners and what the presence of safety should feel like. In specific words, these woman needed to be able to say, and feel safe saying, “You are intimidating me,” “You need to stop,” “This is how you are making me feel.” “I feel scared.” “I feel insecure.” “I don’t see it that way.” “I don’t agree.” “No, I can’t.” or “No, I won’t.”

To continue to want to be involved with the men, these women had to have some hope for change and a capacity to forgive. At the same time, these women needed to be able to hold their partners accountable for their behavior, but from a position of safety that needed to be structured. Forgiveness was necessary but it was only effective when it was not easily given, so that it did not contribute to the pattern or cycle of abuse. The cycle of abuse often went from tension, to violence/abuse, to apology/forgiveness, and back to tension again with more abuse to follow. When applying a forgiveness-and-acceptance strategy, these women struggled to resist enabling the men to continue in this cycle without changing. Applying a forgiveness-and-accountability strategy, these women were better able to have an impact on change. How they managed the tension between forgiveness and accountability was a key element in the change process. One woman articulated it the best:
“You have to hold that person accountable. You have to be so forgiving, but you’re not foolishly forgiving. And you have to be able to help them and hold them accountable. I think truthfully, I look at some women and there’s just a point where you’re just going to have to cut it off and say, ‘You got to let it go. You cannot save the relationship.’ I mean, I’m not so foolish as to think that every relationship can be saved, because it can’t. I think you have to look at each person, and I think it takes time for them to really discover themselves. I don’t think you can start out when something bad has happened and say: ‘No, it’s over. It cannot work.’ I don’t think you can say that. I think you need to truly, each of you, get into counseling. He was actually the one that violated our relationship. He had to get into counseling and I had to kind of monitor and watch, with professional support and guidance, where he was coming from. If he was willing to turn it around, then I had to leave that door open. I don’t think you throw it away, but I don’t think you embrace it too quickly either.”

The women needed to find a structure of engagement that provided safety. One of the women chose to begin reengaging her partner after being apart for a year and hearing stories of how he was changing the way he was relating to other members of his family. She then decided to meet him in a public place for coffee. They met for coffee many times before she felt safe enough to have dinner in a public place. Throughout this process, which took many months, she refused to drive with him because she felt trapped in a car. It didn’t feel safe. Trust slowly built in this fashion, until she was ready to try living with him again.

Another couple decided when they moved back in together, that they would each have their own room and each was not allowed in the other’s room. They knew that when
things got heated between them, they could retreat to their own space and each one would respect the other’s space. They put faith in that arrangement, and it provided the security and retreat they needed to be able to work through building a new relationship. Hearing them talk about that period was delightful, in the way they would finish each other’s sentences and respond to each other’s comments, for example:

“(woman) That was a stage of growth. For the first year, we slept in separate rooms. We weren’t intimate. And we weren’t married. We could have been, but I didn’t like him and I don’t think he really liked me. Did you like me?

(man) No. (laughter)

(woman) (Laughter) It’s funny now, but it wasn’t really funny then. Anyway, so we slept in separate rooms for one year.

(man) And we had many people coming by…

(woman) And they told us that we need to sleep together…

(man) Church people were saying, the devil’s going to come between you because you guys are sleeping in separate rooms.

(woman) Yeah, that’s what they used to tell us. (laughter)

(man) We were like: So what?!? I mean, this is working for us.

(woman) Yeah, it worked for us.

(man) It was really working for us. Yeah, man, that helped heal us.

(woman) Right. Because we were able to go to our separate spots, you know, when we were having arguments, because, you know, everybody has arguments, and we could go to our spaces. So we learned about my-space and his-space.”
None of these women experienced the process of Stage 4 being shorter than they expected. None of them fully realized, at the beginning, the hard work that it was going to take. Some said, if they had known at the beginning what it would require of them, they probably would not have had the courage to step into it. Some, however, also said that due to the good times they have experienced in the last few years, they thought it was worth it. Most of them, who were still in the hard work of stage 4, were still not sure if it was going to be worth it.

*Internal Attitude for Stage 4: Willingness to Work*

The men needed to be willing to work on being safe in relationship, making it a priority, and engaging in the long process of building trust after abuse. They needed to be willing to have a different kind of relationship with their partners, which often included a shift in the power dynamic. The men needed to be willing to be vulnerable with their partner. They needed to be able to listen to their partner and to be impacted by them. They had to submit themselves more to their partner’s needs and wishes and to the process of building safety and trust in the relationship. They needed to be willing to adapt to what their partner needed and was asking of them in order for them to feel safe. They had to be patient with their partner, giving her space and following her pace and timing for healing and building trust. The men often had trouble giving to this process, if they felt that it was one sided. They needed to believe that they would not lose their sense of self in this process, but that they would be able to find themselves in a mutual relationship if safe relating could be achieved.
Throughout the process, the men had to endure the gap they felt between the changes they were making towards trustworthiness and the level of trust they were receiving from their partners. The evidence of their trustworthiness needed many repetitions before the change could be trusted by their partners. It helped for the men to understand and empathize with the reality that the memory and effects of their abuse remained with their partners and that many more memories of self-control, kindness, trustworthiness, and safety were required before trust could be found. They had to accept this lag time, trust in the process, and trust in their trustworthiness if it was genuine. One might think that it would be easier for these men (and these women) to leave their partners and start over with someone else for stage 4, because of the difficulty of healing and reconciling a relationship between a perpetrator and victim of violence. However, these couples have made important changes that may only be a result of the fact that the perpetrator faced the victim and together they tried to repair and heal that relationship. The men needed to be willing to engage this challenge with a willingness to submit to their partners and to the longevity of the process of safe healing and reconciliation.

*The Changes of Stage 4: Becoming Safe in Domestic Relationship.*

In this stage of domestic relational engagement, the men who completed it (1) came to a place of relative peace with themselves in relationship and were less afraid to be known. (2) They pursued the goal and the arduous journey toward safety and trust with their partners, and (3) they came to a more intimate understanding of their partners.

These men became more at peace with themselves as a result of coming to understand themselves better and finding more self-awareness and self-control. As they
gained this self-mastery, they did not externalize their problems as much. When they entered into domestic relationship again with their partners, they needed to already be on this journey, learning to succeed in these ways, and having some success. That’s because when they tried to apply themselves in domestic relationship it was more difficult because of being more intense. The process was long and arduous for both partners. One woman described the process this way:

“There were always challenges going on…always. Instead of 50 times a week, over time it would go down to fewer and fewer a week and he would be able to make the right choices for the situations. If his impulse was not to do it that way, he was finally learning to calm down, to think about what he needed to do, and then to come up with a better solution than what he had been coming up with. And that is being practiced continually. I see struggles with the impulse thing and all I will say is: ‘Your impulses are going again,’ and so that is improving, improving, improving.”

LEARNING TO BE AT PEACE WITH THEMSELVES IN RELATIONSHIP

Being more at peace meant that they were more secure in themselves and less afraid of what they were experiencing internally while in relationship. For example one man spoke about his insecurity, “If I’m not careful, I compare myself with her, and that frustration comes up. And I’ve noticed that that’s really subsided."

As a result the men were more able to experience themselves in relationship with their partners and make corrections or make amends when they did not like what they were doing. They were less protective and defensive, which reduced their need to control their partner and reduced the risk of violent behavior. This was an important change
affecting violent behavior, because the need to protect and defend themselves led to controlling behavior and this often led to violent behavior, when less violent tactics for control were not working. Being less protective and defensive they were more able to listen to their partners and allow their partners to have influence and impact on them. They were more open to share their internal world with their partners and this made their partners feel safer. Some of the women described the difference in terms of less secrets. One said, “Before he talked; now he shares.” One woman needed the security of knowing that her husband understood himself and she was still afraid of him because he struggled looking deeper. She said, “It’s hard to be brutally honest with somebody, you know, and he needs to be brutally honest with me about ‘I’m feeling this way.’ or ‘I’m doing that.’ And I don’t know if he’s really up to doing that, because I think he doesn’t like to think about those things. He just knows he was in a place he never wants to be again. But ‘How did I get there and how do I avoid that?’ I don’t hear that from him and that’s hard for me.”

The women who experienced these kinds of relational changes also said they felt more freedom. The men were requiring less of them - to do certain things or be a certain way. Some of the men said they were learning to deal with their insecurities; they were relying less on their partners to make them feel secure and were less afraid of their partner’s success. Other men saw that their partners needed space to heal and were able to give them the space. The women also felt more freedom to share what was on their mind - their needs, wishes, desires and complaints - and their partners felt less threatened by them.

The men were more at peace with not being able to meet all their partner’s needs
and expectations. One woman put it this way, “I sense there’s more freedom to say how I’m feeling. Like, there’s more freedom for me to be upset, ‘cause before it was hard for me to get upset about something without him taking it personally. So if I was out of sorts, then he would think I’m blaming him for whatever.”

The women also felt the freedom to think differently and feel differently about things and to share these things with their partners. One woman was bold and tactful but it took her a while before she felt strong enough and safe enough to begin to challenge him. When she did, she challenged him in this way: “I learned how to be quiet and let him say what he had to say, whether I was mad or not, because some things he used to say to me used to hurt me, whether or not it was true or false. And I used to think all of it was false anyway. He was always lying to me, you know, making it look like what he did to me was my problem. But it wasn’t. I learned that in domestic violence training. So when he would blame me for stuff, I would let him blame me. Then I would wait a minute, and then when it was a good time, come back and say, ‘You know what? You said this. And I’m going to give you my perspective. I know you might not like it, but this is my perspective.’ We had to talk about the abuse so that he would know where I was coming from, because from his perspective he didn’t understand my feelings and a lot of it was minimized. He would say: ‘You shouldn’t feel that way.’ And I would say ‘Well, yeah, of course, because it wasn’t you.’ I had to always tell him, ‘Of course you don’t feel the way I feel, because it wasn’t you, and you wouldn’t respond like me.’ So that’s how we grew. And we probably went through that for four years…to heal.”
KNOWING YOUR PARTNER

One woman said, “there’s just so much stuff that’s driving our behavior, and to try and sort all of it out and understand all these different pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that are having an effect on our relationship is very staggering and profound… but you have to feel safe enough to do it.” These men had to grow to understand their partners so that they would know how to be with them and would be able to understand where they were coming from. The men who traveled the farthest down the road of change really took the time to get to know their partners. One man said, “We’re to the point where, I know her. I mean, I know women, but I know this woman in particular. And whatever she says, I just listen and I don’t say anything…but sometimes I do.”

And his wife gave an example, “If I tell him I can’t stand him, which I did the other day, he knows how to let me talk, and then when I leave out the door - storm out or do whatever I do - and I come back, then its normal.” He knew her enough to let her vent and give her space. He knew her enough to know she does like him, but that he is a pain sometimes. He was not threatened by her words and he did not feel rejected when she left.

One woman spoke of her partner’s understanding, “I couldn’t forgive for a while. I felt safe enough not to forgive. I just knew it was going to take me some time. And I don’t know exactly when it happened, but I was able to finally release him and not manipulate. I stopped trying to get him back, you know…even if I never said anything, he felt it. He felt the change in me.”
PURSUING TRUST AND SAFETY

A few of the couples arrived at a relationship where trust and safety were experienced by each partner. One woman said, “I just trust him more, so I guess he’s not losing his temper as much, I mean, really he’s not! Once in a while it’ll come up, you know, and it’s never like it was… I’m feeling a lot more safe that he’ll catch himself and that we will talk.” Another woman said, “He’s very safe. I’m not afraid of him at all. If I was afraid of him, I wouldn’t be able to express all this stuff to you (with him here) because it’s a lot. You would have seen him get angry and you would have seen that I was scared but I’m very comfortable talking about our abuse and there was a lot of abuse going on.”

The wife of an older couple spoke of how their house feels now that changes have taken effect, “I just feel like the last ten years have been worth all the others. And granddad is such a wonderful granddad, you know. And our boys won’t see his rage or know about it other than when we talk about it when they’re older, but, I mean, they don’t see it in our house and they don’t have to run from it, or hide, or cower.”

And then the granddad interjected with, “I have to say something though. One of my grandsons said the other day: ‘Well, Granddad, when he wants something, he gets it done his way.’ And I thought, ‘Wow! That’s not what I want him to…He’s four years old!’ He amazed me that he picked up on that. And I thought, ‘What am I doing? Okay, God, there are some areas I need to grow in, because I don’t want him feeling that way, you know.’ Some of that can be healthy and yet it can be destructive, but okay, there’s still something going on there that I need to work on.”
Another man described how their conflict had changed because his partner felt safer in confronting him. He said, “Before, she wouldn’t fight back. She’d just kind of take it. And now she doesn’t, you know. It’s like when I’m out of line, she’s comfortable enough to tell me I’m out of line, and I’m comfortable enough to say, ‘Okay, I’m out of line. You’re right.’”

Other couples were further behind in completing this stage. Some couples put safeguards in place to try and protect themselves, like: “His agreement was that if we both got angry he would leave the house because that’s extremely dangerous. And when he didn’t, I called a friend and the friend got him out of the house. It’s only happened once like that since then, that we’ve both been angry.”

Another woman saw progress but also saw what still needed to change in order to feel safe. “I think we’re at this place where we’re seeing things after the fact, but we’re seeing them more quickly. We’re not seeing them yet before they occur. If change is, ‘Oh, I should not have done that.’ and then ‘Oh, I think I shouldn’t do this.’ we’re still at that blow-up-and-then-realize-it kind of stage as opposed to maybe being further down the road where we see it before it happens. But somehow that distance is shrinking. It’s shrinking and I think we’re both willing to look at stuff and it’s more manageable. There is hope in that. I didn’t feel that way before. I felt very much just hopeless, like this is never going to get any better. Now I think, ‘Okay, we will get there.’”

Other women talked about the importance of trust. One man had not yet sufficiently demonstrated his trustworthiness at the time of the interview because he did not understand himself and his partner was still struggling with him. He hadn’t really completed the work of self-awareness and he spoke about trust in the relationship. “I trust
her, but I don’t feel that she trusts me completely. She doesn’t completely understand what happened and I can’t tell her. I can’t give her an answer that will satisfy that
tought, because I can’t really tell her myself, you know. I don’t think I know myself, to
tell you the truth. It’s just something that happened. And then that puts a doubt that it
could happen again. But I don’t see any real signs of it happening again, because I’m not
feeling like I was before.” She explained herself, “I have a real distrust. I was always on
dge because I didn’t trust him. He needed to earn all the trust back, not just for myself,
but for the children. I think we’re doing fine, but I wouldn’t say great, only because I still
have these insecurities. I don’t feel there’s the reliability. I’m afraid to rely on him and
trust him. And then I feel like he’s fragile in so many ways still, and it’s like I can’t…I
can’t see myself living like this forever because I’m not comfortable with it. I need to be
able to rely on him and trust him.” Even though it had been a long time since he was
physically violent, because he had not shown that he understood his own behavior, she
could not trust him.

Many of the women understood their partner’s vulnerabilities and also reached
out in ways to help their partners feel safe. One woman describes her thinking after
going away after one of their arguments, “And a couple hours later I thought, ‘you
know, I should just reach out.’ So I called him and said, ‘I’m still at the coffee shop. Do
you want to come join me for coffee?’ And he said, ‘okay,’ and he came. So it’s like,
okay, it didn’t go on for days and days and days. And I kind of didn’t want that
abandonment thing to start kicking in for him.”

Couples began to share more as they were able to see their partner as less of a
threat…and the more they shared the more trusting they became. One woman used
powerful imagery to describe how she felt when she was not included in the decision-making, “I feel like I’m sitting at the adults’ table now, instead of being at a card table or the kids’ table at Thanksgiving. So there’s the sense that I feel more a part of things than I did before.” Another man remarked, “What’s changed is she allows me to come in. There was a long time where she didn’t want me to be a part of her activities because she was fearful of where I was at and wondering, was I going to control things and how I was going to dominate or not allow her to be who she needs to be, the free spirit. And I’ve noticed a big change, especially in the last three or four years, where just recently, she allows me to be part of her life… I’m not excluding her, and she’s not excluding me. That’s a big thing that’s changed.”
Stage 5: Communication and Conflict Regulation

In stage 5 each partner felt safe enough and trusting enough to engage other issues of their marriage with their partner. Only two of the couples were identified as having fully arrived at this stage, a stage where marital issues could be addressed without having to return to the issues of safety and trust over and over again. At this stage the couples were ready to do the couples work that is more commonly addressed in couples therapy, primarily improving communication and conflict regulation.

External Intervention for Stage 5: Couples Therapy

Finally, after arriving at a safe style of relating with a more balanced power dynamic, more typical couples therapy started to become an effective intervention.

One of the women talked about her experience of couples counseling at different stages in the process. “[Early in the process, before she separated from him], we were doing couples counseling. Had it not been for that power dynamic, it might have been helpful. In some ways, it made things worse…for me anyway.” Then, after a year of separation and a year working towards safe relating they went to a marriage seminar which she thought did them some good. Then at the time of the interview she was reflecting on the changes thus far and said, “I think at this point we’re probably ready for
the normal marriage enrichment kind of stuff, whereas before, that almost made things worse.” She said “almost” because his perception of couples counseling was that “they were all helpful in some way, shape, or form. You know, just kind of, I don’t know, levels of awareness.” Early on couples therapy may have been making a difference in his thought processes, but at the same time she experienced his relational behavior as worse.

Most of these couples learned techniques for active listening and conflict regulation. As they learned to apply them, they found them helpful for building their relationship after safety in relationship was established.

*Internal Attitude for Stage 5: Willing to Share*

The men who made it to stage 5 had to be willing to: (1) share more of themselves with their partner, (2) share and compromise their wants and wishes while negotiating conflict, and (3) share a sense of personal value with a sense of value of their partner. They moved towards giving attention, space, and importance to their partner’s needs, opinions, desires, and contributions even in the midst of conflict.

*The Changes of Stage 5: Communication and Conflict Regulation*

In this stage communication and conflict regulation improved. Overall peace was maintained while enjoyment increased. Stage 5 was based on the solid foundation of a safe environment, so that the couple could engage the many issues threatening the integrity of the couple.

In this stage, the men were more open and (1) began to express themselves and communicate more, (2) they were better able to handle and sustain back and forth communication, and (3) they thoughtfully considered and cared for their partners well-
being in and out of conflict.

EXPRESSING SELF

As the men became more at peace with themselves in relationship they began to express themselves more. One of the women said, “Now He knows how to talk. He knows how to communicate. He knows how to share, because you know, at first he didn’t know how to share. You know how people say stuff and they don’t say anything? Now he knows how to say stuff that means something.” One man said he began to share more how he appreciated his wife. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate her before, but said, “A huge difference is I actually let her know how much I appreciate her.” Before, his pride got in the way.

One of the women reflected on communication and realized, “I can look back and say: Oh, this isn’t that big a deal. He really has a reason to be upset, but I wish he would just talk to me, you know. And then we do talk. Or if it starts to get intense, we’ll say, ‘Okay, let’s take a minute here.’ And I just feel like we’re talking better, or else we don’t have to talk about it as much…and, I guess, because I’ve dealt with death too, days count. I don’t want to waste them. And he doesn’t either, you know. So we don’t want to waste time with a fight anymore. It’s just not worth it.”

Another woman said it was important to be able to “…say what’s on your mind, so that we can grow, because when he tells me certain stuff and I don’t like it. But most of the time, when I think about it, it helps me. And then some of the stuff that he says, if it doesn’t help me, I’ll say, well, I don’t think that helps me. So I’ll say that, but I don’t bypass what he says, and he doesn’t bypass what I say. That’s how we do it now. We
relate to each other.”

One man thought communication was a key element. “We had to communicate well, because there isn’t a relationship that works without good communication.”

Another said that their communication has become more open and, as it has become more open, it started to become clearer, what the roots of their issues were and what the background of their behavior was. It helped them figure things out.

Active listening techniques were helpful when they were applied: “One of the biggest tools we learned was repeating what the other person said, and nine out of ten times, the other person would say, ‘No, that’s not what I said. or ‘That’s not what I meant.’ You lose so much in your communications. When you regain it, then you have an understanding. Because all of a sudden she would say something and my feelings would be hurt, or vice versa, and then when talking it through, one of us would inevitably say ‘No, that’s not what I said.’ or, ‘That’s not what I meant.’”

Couples who arrived at this stage spoke about communication that led to peace. “I just feel it’s really safe…safer…and peaceful. I understand his quiet. I understand when I need to be out of the room when he’s dealing with something, or when I need to be with him and pray or talk about whatever. It’s just peaceful.” Another couple spoke about peace as well: “He can leave for work and he’s comfortable coming back. When he comes back home from being away from me for so long, there’s not an argument about: Who have you been with? Who have you been around? Instead, I can tell him what I did. He can call me and tell me what he did. And it’s all part of what they would say is normal. It’s a normal relationship.”
MAINTAINING DIALOGUE

All of these men needed to grow in their ability to maintain a dialogue with their partners even when it got hard. A dialogue means back and forth conversation; when conversation was too much for them to handle, some men would dominate conversation, squelch dialogue, and others would avoid conversation. Having more capacity for conversation increased their relational strength and kept them from needing to revert to power tactics when they felt overwhelmed. However, insisting on staying in dialogue was dangerous when they could not handle the dialogue, so for many couples it was still okay to stop the conversation and walk away when it got to be too much. Yet, growing the capacity to stay in conversation without dominating or avoiding was helpful to the relationship. The couple needed to manage this tension in a safe manor.

One man talked about his change in ability to stay in relationship and continue to dialogue. He cited the number of years he spent in his first marriage versus the number of years he spent in his second marriage as a sign of how he was changing. He cited his ability to maintain a job without quitting as another example: “Yes, there have been changes. I’ve calmed down. When I was younger, if something really shifted my day into a black zone, I’d quit. I’d walk! They would wonder, ‘Where’s Billy-Bob? I haven’t seen him for a couple hours.’ I’d be gone. I’d be gone like smoke up the chimney. Early in our marriage, I worked for several different companies, each about a year. I’ve been at my last job six years now. There have been times that I’ve been tempted to quit. There have been times I even cleaned my locker out, but I didn’t quit.” After twelve years of marriage and two years of separation, this couple was able to stay in conversation longer.
Progress had been made; however, it was still not enough for his wife. Even if they had found more safety in their relationship, she was very unsatisfied with how they were relating. Her chief complaint was that they do not talk enough. “There’s just no time that he wants to talk about anything serious…and I want to talk about some serious things, because you need to. Unless you’re just each going to go your own way, which is what we’ve been doing.”

In contrast, several of the men had to learn to talk less and listen more. This man, who avoided “serious things,” was a real talker as well, if one paid close attention to how they described when they first met:

“(Man) I sat there and bent her ear for about…
(Woman) Of the ten hours we were there, he talked to me eight. (laughter)
(Man) And I must have set a record because now she expects me to do it all the time.
(Woman) He likes to talk about his job and cars and trucks and welding. He just doesn’t like to talk about budgets and the future and saving money.”

Another woman talked about conversation as working things through, “It is rarely now that there isn’t something we can’t almost immediately work through, even though I can watch him struggle.”

Another man’s issue with communication was that he always had to be right. “And then we’ve learned over the years how to communicate, as in, I don’t have to be right, as in, it is my opinion. It doesn’t mean she’s right or she’s wrong.” Now they can have conversations about their “opinions.”

Another woman felt that they were getting better at communication around their
most difficult issues. “I can say, if we’ve had a couple of spats or something, it’s usually over bills, which has always been the thing. But we’re doing better and better at it. We take the hardest things now and praying before we do it and we just are getting better about it.”

Another woman described how the communication was getting better, “…because we are resolving things quicker and without as much drama, there really is more hope.”

CONSTANT CONSIDERATION IN AND OUT OF CONFLICT

One woman spoke of how her husband began to care for her differently after she got cancer. “I had cancer twice, and he was wonderful during that time, even though we had things to deal with. We were dealing with them, or putting them on the shelf until we could deal with them.” Her husband explained how he was changing during that time period, starting with some advice that he got from her doctor. “We had a very wise oncologist and I really never heard another oncologist sit the caregiver down and say: ‘Look, your wife is on medications and things that will alter her behavior. She’s probably going to do things that are not her. But when she loses her temper, there will be moments where she’ll probably be swearing. And I know Connie doesn’t swear, but there will be moments and times when she does that. Just remember, ‘That’s not your wife.’ And I thought, ‘That is so practical in many other aspects.’ When people have been wounded, when they’ve been hurt in domestic violence, they begin to react out of defense, out of hurt, out of fear, out of rejection, all of those things. It alters their behavior. And it taught me so much. I realized through this experience that love does an
abundance of things. When she was in treatment and her behavior was difficult, I didn’t have to retaliate; I didn’t have to react. In the Bible, Colossian 3:19, it says, *Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them.* When I begin to become intense or whatever, that clicks in for me - *do not be harsh with your wife.* Because all that does is produce more frustration, more anger. We’re to be the one that lifts up, not dominates, or pushes down, or presses down. It took me a long time to understand that. As I’ve gained that principle, it’s the lifting up, it’s the encouragement that is needed, no matter what she’s doing, no matter how she’s reacting.”

Although the violence in their relationship was horrific in the early stages of their relationship, one woman talked about her husband, saying, “[Now] He’s really a gentleman.” She explained that before they did not know how to relate respectfully as men and women in relationship. He said, “When it came to having a woman, my mentality was every woman was a bitch. I never called her by her name - ‘Shut up, bitch!’ , ‘Who you talking to, bitch?’ - That’s the way I talked to any woman. No matter how much of a man that I said that I was, my mentality was that of a boy. A boy doesn’t know how to treat a woman.” And she said, “I just didn’t think of men as anything. They weren’t people, to me. I just used them for sex and money. …But through the church I found out that the reason for a man is to protect you, provide for you, and be more of a listener. We were to share each other with each other. We talked about the abuse a lot at first, when we were coming out of it. We had to talk about the abuse so that he would know where I was coming from because, from his perspective he didn’t understand my feelings and a lot of it was minimized… So do we talk about the abuse much today? No, not really. I have forgiven him for the abuse… So that’s how we grew. We grew from
understanding and then I could appreciate him, because he’s not too bad. He’s pretty cool! He keeps his jokes and stuff, but he is really a gentleman. I had to learn that he enjoys talking, because he likes to talk. He’s learned to listen and he’s learning not to over-talk me. You know, we’re learning about our differences; we’re like night and day with our personalities. We had to learn the differences of each other. We are just two different people.” He also remarked that, “Our family had to heal. Everybody who was hurt was healing. We worked on our relationship. We worked on our relationship for years. And it took a lot of years, and a lot of understanding, and a lot of tears, and a lot of arguing. We still get in arguments like regular couples, but it’s so totally different now.”

In addition, for these two couples who went the farthest down the path of change, the men had a degree of compassion for their wives, family, and others affected by intimate partner violence which stood out over all the other men that were interviewed. They were making an effort, which exceeded that of the other men, to stand against intimate partner violence in their community. They had pushed past their private shame in order to care for people around them. In addition, their wives talked about their husbands with more fondness and respect than the other women and they talked about their marriages with a greater amount of satisfaction. They had found meaning together in their struggles, through giving their experience to their communities in order to make a difference. They were speaking out publicly about their experience with intimate partner violence in order to help others. It was drawing them closer together and seemed to be a significant part of their change process.

Some of the other couples progressed in communication and conflict regulation although they still struggled frequently with creating safety. The issues of power, trust
and safety were a major deterrent to developing good communication and conflict regulation, but some progress was made toward being more considerate of the other, which the couples found to be helpful.

One couple spoke about increasing their affection because she wanted it, even though it didn’t come naturally for him. He conceded that, “There is probably more affection… We have a rule: If somebody walks in the door, there is to be a hug.” She believed that “hugging short-circuits a lot of [negative] things.” And he seemed to agree with the value of this affection and was making an effort to follow through, “It doesn’t matter even if I go back to the mailbox and back, it still results in a hug. That works well. It helps. She also likes me to hold her in my lap for a while each day. That’s not consistent, but it’s moving in that direction and I’m doing it more willingly than with reticence.”

Another man, after recognized how much he valued his partner, made a consistent, copnscious effort to tell her and show her how much he appreciated her. Another man made it a priority to “feel for her heart” after missing an emotional connection with his partner for most of their married life, saying, “I was so hard on the inside I wouldn’t let myself feel for her. I feel for her now.” His wife put it a little differently, saying, “What I see in him that has changed is a willingness to consider the feelings of other people.”
Discussion of the Findings

This in-depth, qualitative approach to inquiry has brought new insights to the change process for domestic partners who have a history of working through issues of intimate partner violence. No other study has interviewed as many couples with this many years of firsthand experience in the relational change process. In addition, no other study in the literature has developed a model of change for this population as comprehensive as the CMIPV.

It took effort to find couples who were willing to participate in this study. It was interesting to find that there were more women than men willing to participate. Several women who wanted to participate were not accepted into the study, only because their partners were unwilling. Comments from some of the treatment providers and some of the women suggested that the history of intimate partner violence was too shameful for the men to discuss in detail again. Some men did not want to return to those feelings or did not want to stir the pot again, whereas more of the women than the men were less inhibited and more willing talk.

In contrast, the men who did participate, for the most part felt that it was good to talk about their history because it was part of the change process. This is not to say that participating was an easy decision for the women, neither for the men. In fact, all of the couples, except one, were very concerned about how this information was going to be used, and how it would affect them if information about their personal stories got out. For the most part, one can assume that intimate partner violence is still held as a private, shameful matter, even if stories of positive change may be something they are somewhat proud of.
Change Theory

The CMIPV was not preconceived, it emerged from the interview data, despite the fact that there were a number of other change theories in the literature at the time of this study. The researcher had a significant understanding of perpetrator intervention outcome research, but, at the time of data analysis, he was rather ignorant about the literature concerning change theory in general. Despite their existence, currently popular change theories were not investigated before developing the change model of intimate partner violence (CMIPV). The researcher was, therefore, not consciously influenced by existing change models. This aspect of the research process adds to the evidence supporting the CMIPV model as one that emerged from the data.

After developing the CMIPV, the researcher began his review of the literature to see how his model compared to other theories of change. In his review, one change model stood out from the others as one that resonated in many ways with the CMIPV. He was surprised and intrigued to find significant similarities between the transtheoretical model (TTM) of change and the CMIPV.

The TTM model was developed by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente in the 1970s. TTM has its roots in addictive behavior (substance abuse) and has substantial support in the research literature. Since the rise of its popularity, it has been applied and evaluated as a model for other behavioral health issues as well (Prochaska, Velicer, Rossi, Goldstein, Marcus, Rakowski, Fiore, Harlow, Redding, Rosenbloom, & Rossi, 1994). In most cases, the theory has been blindly copied from one behavior to another and tested for validity without much need for thoughtful adaptation to the new context. It turns out that there are a few theoretical and research articles in the literature attempting
to apply TTM to perpetrator intervention for intimate partner violence. The literature so far is mostly conceptual and theoretical, without empirical support for TTM as a model for change in intimate partner violence. Yet, there has been some work done. Eckhardt (2007) and Levesque (2008) have been working to develop and validate assessment tools to assess stages of TTM for perpetrators in treatment (Eckhardt, 2007; Levesque, 2008). Their hope is that assessing the perpetrator’s TTM stage will be helpful in predicting dropout. They also hope to see if tailoring treatment according to stages of change can reduce attrition and improve effectiveness in perpetrator intervention programs. But they need more empirical support.

In some ways the TTM and the CMIPV are mutually supportive, and at the same time the CMIPV brings some doubt to the idea that a transtheoretical model could be transplanted, as is, into this arena. It is suggested that the TTM would need to be significantly transformed, by an intimate understanding of change in the specific context of intimate partner violence, in order for it to be useful. Some comparisons between the two models may be helpful to this process.

The TTM was based on a key insight that is compatible with CMIPV. Both models show change as a process rather than an event, a process that takes many years and is never done. They both have clearly-defined stages that are presented in a linear, successive fashion, and at the same time they both also claim that change is not linear at all, but cyclical. They accept regression, setbacks, and re-offences as common occurrences, and a significant part of the process of change, because change involves learning from your failures.
Similar to the CMIPV model, the TTM model identifies 5 stages of change. These stages were conceptualized in terms of a person’s readiness to change - precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage/model</th>
<th>TTM</th>
<th>CMIPV</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>precontemplation</td>
<td>Wake up and Listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>contemplation</td>
<td>Gaining awareness and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>Caring and responding</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>action</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>maintenance</td>
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Each stage has its own issues and tasks to deal with. At first glance the two models conceptualize their stages very differently. However, when considering the relationship between each stage, and the progression that follows, they can be seen as similar. In the Wake-up and Listening stage of CMIPV, the perpetrator is being challenged to move from the precontemplation to contemplation stage of TTM. In the gaining awareness stage of CMIPV, the perpetrator is contemplating. In the caring and responding stage of CMIPV, he is already moving to action, because he is responding differently. However, this stage can also be seen as a time of preparation, where the building blocks are being formed for the more significant action of learning the practice of safe relating. The practice of safe relating in CMIPV is where the real action of relational change takes place. The communication and conflict regulation stage of
CMIPV can be seen as relationship maintenance after the new way of relating has been established.

TTM was conceptualized in terms of stages and processes. Instead of conceptualizing a driving force (beliefs and commitments), conditions (internal attitude and external intervention) and three domains of change, as CMIPV has done, the TTM identifies 10 potential processes of change that allow a person to progress through the stages. These processes have been separated into two categories that the TTM calls experiential and behavioral processes. The experiential processes tend to apply more to early stages and the behavior changes tend to apply more to the later stages in the model (Lezin, 2007). These two categories of processes exist in the CMIPV as well. The change processes in the CMIPV have the same tendency as the TTM for experiential processes to occur in the early stages and behavioral processes in later stages. In addition, there are a number of change processes identified in TTM that are similar in concept to processes identified in the CMIPV model. Some of the TTM-identified processes were clearly observed in the CMIPV, such as the TTM concept of consciousness-raising, dramatic relief, environmental reevaluation, self-reevaluation, and social liberation. In addition, the domains of change conceptualized in CMIPV can also be understood as change processes, in much the same way as in TTM.

CMIPV has its strength in being rooted in the context of intimate partner violence and its qualitative understanding. TTM has its strength in its potentially universal constructs for behavioral change and its quantitative backing. More research should be done to compare and contrast these models for the specific context of intimate partner violence.
Change for the Women in Contrast to Change for the Men

Relational change involves two people and usually both people are changing in some way or another at the same time. One way to conceptualize relational change is to consider merging the change processes of two individuals to get a more complete picture. Relational systems can therefore become extremely complex. This researcher did not attempt to take on the full extent of this complexity. Instead, he chose to focus on one individual’s change process as primary and the other as secondary, in order to reduce the complexity as a first step.

The men’s change process was chosen as the primary focus, since they were the perpetrators of the violence. As a result, the CMIPV describes the perpetrator’s change process. In this application of the word “primary,” one should not confuse it to mean that the man is more important than the woman in these relationships. In this case, primary means that the men were the primary subjects to be observed for change because they were the perpetrators of the violence. From this perspective, their partners were seen as primary witness of behavioral and relational change, as well as potential agents of change, who were not static but were also changing during the process.

In this study, it became evident that the women also changed significantly during this process, but since their change process was not the primary focus of the study, there was not enough data to develop a complete model of their change. Instead, the women’s change processes were investigated only far enough to understand how they operated as agents of change for the men and how their own change affected the men’s change process. There was plenty of evidence to suggest that the change these women had made for themselves also had a profound impact on the men’s change process.
Because these women were victims of physical violence, the ethical and political institutional response has been appropriate: to never require, request, or even subtly encourage that the victim be instrumental in the perpetrator’s change process. However, this study shows that these women were instrumental in the change process as significant change agents. This should not suggest that institutions enlist the aid of victims in the perpetrator’s change process. Victims should not be encouraged one way or another, but should be empowered to make up their own minds as to how they want to be involved with their partner. At the same time, victims should be educated about good safety practices when a risk of reoccurring violence is present. They should be educated about the importance of holding to a significant period of separation as critical to the change process. They should be educated about the impact of abuse. They should also be educated about the difficulties, challenges, and longevity of the change process, and the rare likelihood of a successful outcome with a strong marriage satisfaction.

The involvement of the victim in the change process is a delicate matter, requiring more than a simple-minded focus on effective change. There are ethical and safety issues to consider. In addition, it still seems ethical, and in the best interest of the victim, to allow for court-ordered precautions, such as no-contact orders, to attempt to safeguard the victim when the risk of violence is high and/or the victim is unable to choose for her own safety. Not only is it ethical to enforce no-contact orders, but the results of this study suggest that separation may also be an important stage in the man’s change process.

The woman’s change process was not the primary focus of this research. A worthwhile follow-up study, for the purpose of developing a relational model, would be
to focus on the women’s change process as a primary focus and the man’s change process as secondary. From the two models, a relational model formed out of the merging of two could be developed.

*The Voice of the Women*

In the interview process and in the data analysis, the women were considered the primary witnesses of behavioral and relational change. The men had a lot more direct information to say about their internal changes, which tended to take place more in the first stages of the model, where the individual work was central to the change process. Therefore, there were more quotes from the men than the women to support these findings. However, the women could describe from an observer’s and receiver’s perspective the behavioral and relational changes that took place; these tended to take place more during the later stages of the model, where the relational work was central to the process. Therefore, there were more quotes from the women than the men to support these findings.

In the interviews, the interviewer made a conscious effort to hear at least as much from the women as from the men. He made a concerted effort to focus on the men’s change from the victim’s perspective. An analysis of the transcripts showed that in all interviews the women had more to say about their experience than the men. After reflecting on the interview process, the interviewer never felt that he had to work very hard to encourage the women to speak openly about their experience. It is possible, due to the strategy of interviewing the couples together, that one might think the women could not have been open and honest because the men were still enacting power and
control over their partners. However, this was not the interviewer’s experience. One woman put it this way, “I'm not afraid of him. Because if I was afraid of him, I wouldn't be able express all this stuff to you. You would have seen that he was angry and you would have seen that I was scared. But I'm very comfortable in talking about our abuse.” Although the interviewer considered himself experienced in recognizing power and control dynamics, he could still have been fooled. But he experienced the women as more willing and able to be open and straightforward than the men, whereas some of the men showed signs of struggling with shame and wanted to avoid talking about specifics of past behavior. In addition, many of the women were able to talk about what they thought still needed to change. Most of the women felt brave enough to express discontent with their partner, expecting that they would not experience a violent retaliation in return. One of the couples, however, did express an interest in speaking with the interviewer individually because they felt they could not talk freely with their partner present. Their individual interviews as well as their couples interview were included in the interview data. According to the CMIPV, this couple was still at the beginning stages of relational work.

The interviewer experienced the women as a strong presence in the interview process and in their domestic relationships. They articulated their experiences well and had good insight to share. They were able to talk about what had changed and what had not changed. This model represents the women’s perspective on the men’s change process as well as - if not more than - the men’s perspective.
Christian versus Universal Change

The common belief system of this group of research participants was a peculiar phenomenon to be reckoned with, because this particular outcome was not designed into the selection method or the screening criteria. Research shows that religious beliefs are one of the primary reasons that women stay in abusive relationships. “The stakes to keep the marriage together (and perhaps to accept the battery) are much higher for religious women.” (Nason-Clark, 2004, p. 305) The other primary influences on staying together are children and financial concerns. In corroboration of that research, all of these couples had a religious belief that encouraged them to stay together. In addition, all but one of these couples had multiple children, and some spoke about financial concerns influencing their decision to get back together after separation.

One suspicion about the common belief system of this group of participants would be that the researcher inadvertently drew from Christian sources because they were aligned with his own faith tradition. There are, however, counterpoints to this suspicion. The researcher made contact with all perpetrator treatment providers in the State of Washington without religious discrimination. His desire was to develop a model of change that had the potential for research and application with a wider segment of perpetrators of intimate partner violence, not limited to a specific faith tradition. However, there is no doubt that the selection method had some influence on creating a group of participants with a common faith tradition. Just the fact that there were no other religious beliefs represented is enough to raise the question, because there are other religious belief systems that are prone to encourage couples to stay together even in abusive relationships.
The model itself has a couple of elements that are specific to the participant’s Christian worldview, but for the most part the model is conceptualized with elements that are not bound by any certain religious ideology. The only two places in the model where religion played a role were in the driving force and the internal shift. The participants specifically spoke about their driving force and their internal shift from a protestant Christian viewpoint, however, this researcher chose to name them with non-religious terms coming from the data, believing that this model had the potential for a more general application than just for the protestant Christian couple. These elements are conceptualized in such a way that the driving force and internal shift could be substituted by elements of alternative belief systems, as long as these elements related to the model in similar fashion. The similarities between the TTM and CMIPV give some credence to the possibility that this model could have a broader application than is suggested by the specific, common religious beliefs of these research participants. Further research, to test this hypothesis would be required.

*Implications for Intervention Services*

The CMIPV, like the TTM, because they are both stage models, considers intervention to be most effective when it is designed for the specific stage at which the person finds himself. When considering implications for intervention services, it is best to look at each stage separately. These findings are not generalizable because these participants do not represent a statistically representative sample. A hypothetical assumption that this model is applicable to a more general population could be made just to consider the potential implications for intervention services if the results were
generalizable. The rest of this section speculates on the hypothetical implications of the CMIPV in order to stress the value of further investigation of these findings.

Stage 1 is the awakening to a problem that must be addressed, and cannot be ignored, because someone has said that things can’t continue the way they have been going. According to this model, the current legal and law enforcement response sets the ball in motion, as it should, at the beginning of the change process. Mandatory arrests, no-contact orders, and perpetrator treatment may be helpful to the change process because they stop the current pattern of behavior, they separate the couple and they push the perpetrator into an environment where he can gain awareness and understanding.

Stage 2 is where the perpetrator grows in awareness and understanding. Our current structure for perpetrator intervention may be appropriate for making a difference in stage 2. However, these findings suggest that our current perpetrator intervention programs may not do enough to create behavioral or relational change in a domestic relationship. Perpetrator intervention programs are currently our only intervention strategy. At most, these programs may provide a context for stage 2 and stage 3 change, but not stage 4 and 5. Based on this researcher’s experience, perpetrator intervention programs often do little more than help the person in gaining awareness and understanding – equivalent to stage 2 change in the CMIPV.

Stage 3 is a critical step that begins with an internal shift. Perpetrator intervention programs need to have this internal shift in mind. We need to understand it better. From the findings, there is some sense that intervention services may not be able to make the shift happen. The findings suggest that we have little control over when or if it happens except that ‘gaining awareness and understand’ precedes it. But if the service provider
recognizes the shift as critical, and waits for it expectantly, he/she may provide space for it to surface and be able to facilitate the natural change processes. We need to know what leads to this shift, how to recognize the shift when it happens, and what to do when it does. Without this shift, men are stuck in the change process with new awareness and understanding, but with no behavioral or relational change.

Stages 4 and 5 are centered on relational work and relational change. Stage 5, communication and conflict regulation, may be adequately supported by the best practices of couples therapy. However, Stage 4 highlights a potential real problem in our response to intimate partner violence. Practicing being safe in domestic relationship, stage 4, has no established intervention or support strategy. The couples who navigated this phase have done so largely on their own, or with limited and inexperienced support, and at high risk for re-offense. Most of the couples who were interviewed were still struggling to complete this stage.

The identification of stage 4 creates a conspicuous hole in our current intervention strategy to eradicate intimate partner violence. According to this model, if the perpetrator has completed stages 2 and 3 with the help of a perpetrator intervention program, they are going to return to their partner, or find a new partner, but still not have learned the practice of creating safety in a domestic relationship. In addition, these findings suggest a new understanding of what it means to be safe in relationship. These couples understood safety more in terms of emotional safety than physical safety. Their definition of safety should help us rethink what it means for intervention programs to be purposed for victim safety: (1) safe to confront, (2) safe to be vulnerable, (3) safe to be different, (4) safe to be disappointed or cause disappointment.
Suggestions for Future Research

The CMIPV has the potential to be the foundation for a more generalizable understanding of change in intimate partner violence. The CMIPV, and the hypotheses that support it, have been empirically generated and are grounded in interview data. However, this theoretical model needs more testing, validation, and potential modification as we grow in understanding of its usefulness. This is only the raw beginning. It is an empirically based theory. However, the future of this model requires a long road of continued research to find more substantial, viable, and generalizable empirical support.

A good model not only needs to accurately describe the phenomenon it represents, but also it needs to be usable. That is to say, the CMIPV needs to be useful for facilitating the direction of future research and provide helpful direction for intervention strategies. Some specific key requirements would be that it needs to be made up of measurable building blocks for quantitative research and provide solid links to intervention techniques.

Studying this model within a broader group, both in numbers and diversity of individuals and couples, would be a good next step. More work to compare and contrast CMIPV with TTM for intimate partner violence could build on the strength of each model and hone our understanding of the change process. The model may need refinement to be more useful to researchers and clinicians. Valid and reliable assessment tools, for stage identification, would need to be developed to facilitate further research and treatment planning according to this model. Thoughtful intervention strategies
specific for each stage will need to be developed and tested in experimental outcome research.

Limitations of this Research Study

This research study was a qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of seven couples who have experienced change in intimate partner violence. It attempted to develop a model of change based on their experiences. The researcher followed a grounded theory approach to inquiry and, therefore, designed the study to generate a theory of change based on empirical inquiry. The study was not designed to validate the model as representative for all of intimate partner violence, or even for those with similar demographics. Couples who stay together after intimate partner violence, who are devout protestant Christians, and who are willing to share their experiences because they believe they have some positive change to share with others are a unique segment of the population of those who have a history with intimate partner violence. This severely limits the generalizability of this study. Even with these limitations, this study provides a valuable, never-before-documented perspective on intimate partner violence. In addition, it adds a new and promising theory to the literature concerning intimate partner violence and the introduction of a new model worthy of ongoing investigation.
References


Southers, L. R. (1999). *Phenomenological ethnographic interviews with men who have battered and their intimate partners: The intervention experience and the transition from battering to nonbattering.* Ann Arbor, MI: Bell and Howell Information and Learning.


APPENDIX A

Sample Candidate Invitation Letter
(Participation Invitation letter)

Dear ______(Research Candidate),

You and your domestic partner have been identified by _______ (name of treatment provider / victim advocate) as potential candidates for a research project that wants to collect the stories and experiences of domestic partners who have addressed issues of domestic violence in their relationship and have chosen to stay together through the experience of perpetrator treatment and/or victim support. In hearing your story, my hope is that you will be able to inform us about what has happened for you, what the experience was like, what potentially has changed for you and your relationship good or bad, and that you would give us some insight as to what has contributed to that change. This will only take a couple of hours of your time and your identity will be kept confidential. Your participation could effect changes in the way our society and its institutions respond to issues of domestic violence.

I have included two consent forms, two screening questionnaires and two return envelopes. One for you and the other is for your partner. Each of you should fill them out separately and mail them separately. If you want to participate you can fill out the forms and mail them to me and I will contact you. You can also call me at 425-275-2637 if you have any questions or would like to discuss it further.

As the primary researcher for this special project, I want you to know my heart-felt desire to treat your stories with respect, and I look forward to hearing from you if you are willing to participate and, if not, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Troy Fenlason, M.A., Psy.D. Candidate
Primary Researcher
Partners Addressing DV Project
Antioch University, Seattle, WA
APPENDIX B

Sample Antioch University Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent Form for Research Participants
Antioch University Seattle

The Doctorate of Psychology Program supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, and that if you do withdraw from the study, you will not be subjected to reprimand or any other form of penalty.

Procedures to be followed in the study and approximate time it will take to participate:

I, ___________________________ (insert name), understand that I have been invited to participate in a research study that seeks to document and understand the stories and experiences of domestic partners who have address issues of domestic violence in their relationship and have chosen to stay together through the experience of perpetrator treatment and victim support.

If I agree to participate in the study, I will be asked a few questions over the phone as a screening to see if I meet all the requirements for participation in the study. If I and my partner meet the requirements, an in-person interview will be scheduled during which I and my partner will be asked questions regarding our experience, including our experience of interventions, treatment and support that I or my partner received and its impact on us and our relationship. I understand that if clarification about some aspect of the in-person interview is needed a follow-up interview may be scheduled to ask some clarifying questions.

The phone screening interview will take approximately 10 minutes. The length of the in-person interview will vary depending on the answers given, however, 1-2 hours is the estimated time commitment. The length of the follow-up interview (which may or may not be need) will depend on the clarifying questions but should not take any longer than the first interview.

I understand that the in-person interviews will be audio taped. I understand that the interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. I understand that all the data gathered in this study will be stored in a secure area with access only by the primary researcher. All data will be kept for 7 years and then erased. I understand that in an attempt to protect my identity my name will not be used and that any data that might uniquely identify me will be disguised in any reports or presentations that come out of this study.
Description of any attendant discomforts or other forms of risk involved for subjects taking part in the study:

Although there is no direct risk to my health by participating in this study, I understand that due to the personal nature of the questions being asked, I may feel uncomfortable at times. I acknowledge that I may refuse to answer any question at any time. I am also aware that if, due to the nature of the questioning, I become emotionally overwhelmed, referrals will be made available to me for mental health professionals that I may call for assistance.

Description of benefits to be expected from the study or research:

It is hoped that policy makers, treatment providers, victim advocates and more importantly other domestic partners will benefit from hearing my experience and perhaps they may consider making some changes after hearing the perspective of domestic partners who have experienced the process.

Appropriate alternative procedures that would be advantageous for the subject:

My participation in this study is on a voluntary basis; if I, or my domestic partner, decide not to participate or decline to continue at any time, we will do so without penalty.

I have read the above statement and have been fully advised of the procedures to be used in this project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to ask any questions I had concerning the procedures and possible risks involved. I understand the potential risks involved and I assume them voluntarily. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to reproach. I may ask for the results of the final study.

Signature _______________________________ Date _________
Subject and/or Authorized Representative

Signature _______________________________ Date _________
APPENDIX C

Sample Screening Questionnaire
Screening Questionnaire

Name: ___________________________ Gender: ___________________________

Phone number: ___________________ Religion: ___________________________

Age: _____________________________ # of Children: _______________________

Race: _____________________________ # of years in current domestic relationship _____________.

I or my partner have experienced/participated in domestic violence in our relationship.
  a. yes
  b. no

When was the last time physical violence or threats of physical violence occurred in your relationship? ____________ (month, year).

_______ completed domestic violence perpetrator treatment due to events that happened with my current partner.
  a. I have
  b. My Partner has
  c. Neither my partner nor I have

Date of completion of DV treatment: ____________ (month, year).

_______ participated in victim advocacy/counseling services due to events that happened with my current partner.
  a. I have
  b. My Partner has
  c. Neither my partner nor I have

I am still living with the same partner I had when the domestic violence began to be addressed.
  a. yes
  b. no

I feel comfortable talking about my experience with domestic violence and my current relationship.
  a. yes
  b. no

I am willing to tell about my experience and have it audio recorded.
  a. yes
  b. no
APPENDIX D

Sample Newspaper Ad Seeking Participants
Have you conquered abuse or violence in your current relationship?

We would like to hear your story. Others could benefit from your experience.

A study that seeks to collect personal experiences in a confidential setting is being conducted to better understand change in intimate partner relations. It will only take 1-2hrs and you will receive compensation for your time.

Please call 425-275-2637 for more information.