SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN NON-VIOLENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

RUTH NEUSTIFTER

(Under the Direction of Denise C. Lewis)

ABSTRACT

The long-term effects of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the later non-violent romantic relationships of those who have survived it are important areas that have not been the focus of most IPV research. This study was intended to extend the literature through an exploration of the process of successfully transitioning out of violent relationships into new non-violent relationships from a perspective based in resilience and strengths-based theory. The term “survivor-couple” is developed from the literature to describe these later, non-violent relationships, and research questions are posed regarding the relational strengths of these survivor-couples, the factors that contribute to their resilience, and the experiences survivors identify as illustrators of the survivor-couple’s resiliency. Eleven participants who survived past, violent relationships and are currently in non-violent relationships with new partners were interviewed, and the resulting data were analyzed using grounded theory analysis. Analysis detailed the important factors that affect and relate to the transition out of violent relationships and into non-violent relationships. These factors were broken into six main categories that correspond to Strauss and Corbin’s Paradigm Model and describe the contexts, strategies, and dynamics related to resilience surrounding this transition: Increases in Risks and Strengths; Microsystemic Conditions; Macrosystemic Conditions; Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships; Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood; and Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. Findings are illustrated using quotes from participant interviews, and applications for IPV outreach providers and other professionals are provided.

INDEX WORDS: Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, resilience, family resilience, strengths-based, couples
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"Life is so magic... when you expect good things or you're just willing to, to open the door, magic stuff happens... Yeah, there’s a happy ending to this story." Ann

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a complex phenomenon that impacts all levels of our society (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). It takes a myriad of forms, from physical battering to emotional abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993), and its short-term impact on the psychological well-being of the victim has been well documented (see Campbell & Soeken 1999; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Brady, 1997; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995). It is an often distressing phenomenon (Waldrop & Resick, 2004), that can be expected to cause difficulty in later relationships due to the risk of mental health concerns (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Golding, 1999).

Research in this area, however, has yet to sufficiently address the long-term psychosocial impact of IPV on victims and on their later, nonviolent relationships (Bogat, Levendosky, Theran, Von Eye & Davidson, 2003; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000, Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Many people in violent relationships will escape (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Walker, 1980; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns & Shortt, 1996; Taylor, 2002), and it is possible for survivors of IPV to experience fewer negative consequences than
predicted in the literature (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Some IPV survivors look forward to establishing future relationships, and feel that they have gained skills and knowledge that contribute to that effort (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002). Research has found that these survivors can, and do, co-create mutually enjoyable, nonviolent relationships with later partners (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Zink, Jacobson, Pabst, Regan & Fisher, 2006; Weiss, 2004), although this has not been explored in great detail. A supportive new partner can assist in reducing the risk of psychological consequences (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002). Such mutually enjoyable, committed and nonviolent partnerships are termed “survivor-couples” in this study, a phrase that has been created to recognize their ability to thrive in spite of the lingering negative consequences of the prior violent experiences.

Intimate Partner Violence researchers are joined by feminist qualitative and outreach authors in their focus on the pathology, crisis, and deficit-based attributes of IPV (Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Some publications, however, have included brief mentions or illustrations of relationships that support the existence of survivor-couples (see: NiCarthy, 1986, 1987, 2004; Weiss, 2000; Anderson, 1997; Rosenberg, 2007; Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, feminist writing has encouraged researchers and service providers to recognize an identity for IPV survivors that goes beyond victimhood (Davis, 2002; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gilfus, 1999; Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Resilience studies explore the ability of individuals to adapt and thrive after (and during) traumatic experiences (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Weiss, 2004; Walsh, 1998, 2006). This perspective offers a more hopeful alternative to pathology-based
perspectives on research (Benard, 2006; Rutter 1994). Resilience research has traditionally focused on individuals, often beginning in childhood (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1992); however, some authors have applied the concept to entire families with children (Walsh 2003). The concept of survivor-couples further expands these efforts by applying resilience studies to long-term, intimate couples. This is considered a fitting and potentially useful application of the concept of resilience (Walsh, personal communication, December 3, 2007).

The literature on IPV has focused largely on prevention, treatment, and immediate psychological effects. This creates a clear gap in the literature on the resilience of survivors and their later partnerships, as well as the process of transitioning from a violent relationship to a nonviolent relationship. Studies on these survivors and survivor-couples will offer a depathologized approach to outreach and policy efforts targeting long-term IPV survivors and their later, nonviolent relationships.

**Statement of the Problem**

The lack of research-based literature on the long-term psychosocial impact of IPV on later, nonviolent relationships (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996) leaves outreach professionals and survivor-couples without necessary information on the process of transitioning from a violent relationship to a nonviolent one. Most IPV survivors do transition out of these violent relationships (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Walker, 1980; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns & Shortt, 1996; Taylor, 2002), and many later create these mutually-enjoyable, committed relationships with a caring partner (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Zink, Jacobson, Pabst, Regan & Fisher, 2006; Weiss,
These survivors, and survivor-couples, remain largely unrepresented in the research literature and the transition process from violent to nonviolent relationships continues to be virtually unexplored.

How do survivors of IPV make this transition from violent to nonviolent relationships? What is the process involved for people who have engaged in this transition? The literature on resilience offers some background for the exploration of these questions through the stories of IPV survivors who have successfully transitioned to a nonviolent relationship. Information in this area is sparse, and frequently stems from deficit-focused research. This study addresses the gap in the literature by approaching the study of this process from a perspective of strengths and resilience.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), who are now in later non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship. In order to facilitate this exploration, the following research questions were raised:

1.) What do IPV survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths?

2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships?

3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationships?

This exploration of committed IPV survivor-couples, through the perspective of the abuse survivor, serves several purposes. First, it provides an opportunity to contribute further research-based evidence that these couples do exist. Secondly, it creates an initial
exploration into the process of resilience for these individuals and their relationships. This information can assist researchers, outreach professionals, and others interested in the study of IPV, as well as those seeking avenues for the development of outreach efforts based in resilience instead of a pathological or deficits-based approach.

Definitions

The terms defined below are used throughout the text of this dissertation. All of them are defined in the text itself, as well as in the following section.

**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is also referred to as domestic violence, an abusive relationship, or a violent relationship. It is defined as “violence committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, or current or former boyfriend or girlfriend” (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003, p.3). In addition to physical and sexual violence, it can also include: coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying and blaming; using children; male privilege; and economic abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

**Resilience:** The term “resilience” stems from a field of study focusing on the ability of individuals and families to thrive in spite of traumatic experiences (Walsh, 2006).

Resilience refers to a *dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process. (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p.543)
Resilience studies offer researchers, outreach workers, and the public a hopeful alternative to the pathology-based perspective (Benard, 2006). Resilience theory states that “overcom[ing] adversity challenges our culture’s conventional wisdom: that early or severe trauma can’t be undone; that adverse experiences always damage people sooner or later…” (Walsh, 2006, p. 4).

**Strengths-Based Perspective:** This perspective originated in the social work literature and is applicable to clinical and research efforts on individual, family and community resilience across the lifespan (Saleebey, 2006). This systemic approach focuses on the ability of humans to heal from trauma through the use and creation of strengths.

[The strengths-based perspective] denies that all people who face trauma and pain in their lives inevitably are wounded or incapacitated or become less than they might… All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes, however dashed and distorted these may have become through circumstance, oppression, and trauma. (Saleebey, 1996, p. 297)

**Survivor:** For the purposes of this research, a survivor is considered an individual who has experienced past relationship violence and terminated, or otherwise escaped, that relationship. The use of the word survivor for these purposes stems from feminist literature that uses the term to replace the word “victim,” in order to reduce the stigma associated with surviving IPV (see: Davis, 2002; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gilfus, 1999; Anderson & Saunders, 2003).
**Survivor-Couple**: This term was created to describe nonviolent couples in which at least one member survived prior IPV in a past relationship. Survivor-couples thrive in spite of any lingering negative consequences of the prior violent relationship. This concept is a relational application of the Walsh’s process-focused family resilience perspective (2003).
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This study was designed to address three research questions. First, it asked what Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths. The second question asked what contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships. Finally, it asked for the experiences that survivors identify as illustrators of the resilience of their nonviolent relationship. In order to conduct this study, it was necessary to conduct a thorough review of the literature. Foundational and recent literature was used to create a solid knowledge of the available research related to this area, and later to create a context from which to consider the findings and how they may be applied. A great deal has been written about IPV over the past several decades, and a significant shift in focus toward longitudinal research is apparent.

This chapter will present a groundwork for the study, based in the relevant literature. First, I will offer an exploration of the purpose and significance of conducting research in this area. This section will review the lack of long-term psychosocial research on IPV survivors or the potential benefits of later nonviolent romantic relationships. Secondly, I will present the scope of literature included in this review, followed by limitations of this review. Next, I will review the literature on IPV, including: definitions, statistics and prevalence, long-term psychosocial impacts, and feminist contributions to definitions of IPV. Then I will present a review of the literature
on resilience, both in individual and relational contexts. In that section I will define resilience, summarize foundational research in the area, and apply the concepts to this purpose of this study. This will be followed by an exploration of the strengths-based literature, and its applications to this study. After that, I will present a section on the feminist outreach and qualitative literature on this area. It will offer an exploration of the foci of this work, and how it can be adapted to the purposes of this research. After considering the contributions from relevant feminist literature, I will provide an overview of the limited illustrations of long-term relational resilience that exist in qualitative and outreach publications. Finally, I will offer potential applications for research in this area, leading to a context of hope for survivors of IPV and their later, nonviolent relationships.

Existing literature on intimate partner violence has rarely addressed later relationships or utilized strengths-based research practices; instead, it has focused on the time prior to and during the violent relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). This study is a valuable effort situated within a small base of literature with content that includes the strength and resiliency of IPV survivors in later, nonviolent relationships (see Davis, 2002; Humphreys 2003). As a result, the term “survivor-couples” is introduced here as a title for these thriving couples, in order to recognize the importance of the relational aspect of their resilience. This chapter will review relevant literature to explore the existence of survivor-couples and the value of developing research on this area through one specific group: IPV survivor-couples.

In recent years, theorists, researchers, and outreach professionals across fields have created a strong movement away from deficit-based approaches to working with families (Benard, 2006; Bonanno, 2004; Davis, 2002). Family resilience offers an
alternative to such pathology-focused research and therapy by exploring the processes that allow some to thrive in the face of adversity, while others struggle to function (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Waldrop & Resick, 2004; Walsh, 2003). The varying effects of these traumatic events on individuals, especially children (see Feinauer, Callahan, and Hilton, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992), have been of great interest to researchers, yet the lasting impact of such occurrences on intimate relationships has rarely been examined (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Walsh, 2003). Intensely negative experiences have the potential to create long-term consequences, positive and negative, on couples who form even after such events have ceased (Kirkwood, 1993). While some couples are not able to stay intact while navigating such toxic influences, others are able to thrive (Connolly, 2005; Kirkwood, 1993).

The majority of publications on intimate partner violence—also called domestic violence (DV)—have focused on prevention, treatment, and immediate or short-term impact, while the future of survivors of IPV remains relatively unexplored (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Research findings, anecdotal evidence, and common sense inform us that at least some of the vast number of IPV survivors are interested in, and able to, co-create and maintain committed, mutually enjoyable, and nonviolent intimate relationships after leaving abusive partners (see Dugan & Hock, 2006). For reasons such as these, IPV survivor-couples are a relevant subset of survivor-couples, suitable for initial efforts in the development of the concept.

The concept of survivor-couples, as proposed in this paper, expands the resilience literature from its previous focus on individuals (particularly children) to intimate relationships (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Walsh, 2003). Survivorhood, a concept
from the feminist literature on IPV (see Sperlich & Seng, 2008), is combined with concepts from family resilience (Benard, 2006; Bonanno, 2004; Walsh, 1998, 2003), expanding both aspects from their individual applications to a relational meaning that has remained unexplored. In order to support the creation of this concept, an overview of the nature, extent, and psychosocial impact of IPV will be presented. Suggestions will be made for exploring IPV survivor-couples by using social work’s strengths-based perspective. Examples from feminist collections of narratives from IPV victims who seek or have developed survivor-couples of their own will be noted. Finally, implications for outreach, clinical work, community building and future research will be addressed.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to support this study by reviewing the relevant literature and applying it to the potential for relational resilience in IPV survivors entering later, nonviolent relationships. In this chapter I also create and define the term “survivor-couple” in order to refer to these couples and more easily explore their role in the relevant literature.

Survivor-couples are committed, mutually beneficial relationships that demonstrate the process of resilience through their ability to maintain and increase intimacy while supporting the healing of traumatic events that occurred previously or are otherwise external to the formation of the relationship. This definition results from the application of Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker’s (2000) definition of violence to the relational context of intimate couples. The concept of survivor-couples will be explored by utilizing concepts from the study of resilience (Benard, 2006; Bonanno, 2004; Walsh,
and the strengths-based perspective (Salebeey, 1996, 2001), as applied to survivors of prior IPV and their later, nonviolent partners.

The development of this term supports a valuable expansion of the existing literature. This research has the potential to impact a large portion of the population through influencing outreach efforts. It may also help to create a context of hope for the many survivors of IPV, and affiliated outreach professionals, by offering an innovative long term perspective on the relational resilience of survivor-couples.

Significance

There is a dearth of literature on the long-term impact of IPV on those who have left the relationship, including the process of healing and developing later nonviolent relationships. This section explores the potential value of considering the benefits of membership to a survivor-couple for both partners. Despite these positive possibilities, however, IPV survivors and their partners find that they and their relationships are isolated by the gap in the literature regarding this topic, which is described in further detail below. This study may create a significant impact on the existing literature by addressing this topic, as well as the underlying themes of sexism that may have contributed to near-absence of publications in this area.

Existing research on IPV rarely considers the concept of healing, focusing instead on prevention of current and ongoing abuse without reaching past the termination of the relationship between survivor and perpetrator (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Recovery from abuse is a painfully slow process for many, but healing can occur. Survivors can (and do) enter mutually beneficial and enjoyable intimate relationships (Anderson, 1997; Dugan & Hock, 2006; Feinauer, Callahan, and Hilton,
Such relationships, especially with an invested and supportive partner, can prove to be a context for continued healing of possible long term effects of abuse (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002). Unfortunately, this potential benefit of committed, intimate relationships has not been adequately explored in the literature, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter. Available literature on IPV focuses, instead, on prevention, assessment, guides for escape from abusers, and methods for treatment of victims and violent couples or abusers (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Later nonviolent relationships, as vehicles of healing or not, are beyond the scope of these works (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). There is a significant need for increased offerings that approach IPV from other perspectives, especially those that resist a deficits-based focus (Weiss, 2004).

Survivors, survivor-couples and their service providers are left isolated and without hopeful examples in the existing literature (see Bonanno, 2004; Benard, 2006). Non-abused partners in these relationships have even fewer resources in the literature for support, learning, and community. While there is some literature on the roles and struggles of partners of rape survivors (Levine, 1996) and on the importance of men’s involvement in ending such violence (Kivel, 1992), such efforts do not address the application of resilience to survivor-couples. Various workbooks, such as that by Dugan and Hock (2006), can be found to assist survivors with the healing process, or with reclaiming their sexuality. However, this individual approach does not attempt to address the needs of couples from a relational perspective.
Research on IPV has largely ignored the adjustment process that takes place after the abusive relationship has terminated (Campbell & Soeken, 1999). It is particularly difficult to find resources for nonviolent relationships in which at least one member has survived abuse prior or external to that couple. This lack of research on survivor-couples can be connected to several important consequences that impact survivor-couples and larger society. First, it reflects and endorses the stigmatized assumption that survivors of IPV are not capable of participating in committed, mutually beneficial and enjoyable intimate relationships. Second, it supports the view that potential (presumably non-abused) partners are not willing to invest in relationships with survivors. Finally, it creates the impression that IPV survival is a primary and defining characteristic that is dominant over, and perhaps exclusive of, all other possible roles in life.

These assumptions seem to mirror gendered stereotypes on the vulnerability of women, who comprise the majority of IPV survivors, and the emotionally detached and self-centered nature of men, who are assumed to be unabused partners of these women. The study of committed, enjoyable, and mutually beneficial survivor-relationships will open the literature to recognition of their existence and to an examination of couples’ resilience to the effects of surviving any long term effects of prior violent relationships.

This area of study holds the potential to offer significant contributions to the literature in several ways. There is a lack of academic publications on the long-term healing process of IPV survivors, especially related to psychosocial phenomena such as romantic relationships. This creates a lack of resources for members of survivor-couples and those who serve them through research or outreach. A range of assumptions, many linked to gender, may go unaddressed due to the lack of research in this area. This study
will begin to address this gap in the literature. As a result, it may also offer additional resources to stakeholders in this area, and contribute to the further examination of some of the gendered assumptions related to IPV and survivor-couples.

*Scope of the Review*

Literature from a number of fields will be examined for relevancy to the development of the concept of survivor-couples. The majority of reviewed sources come from the fields and areas of resilience and family resilience studies, feminist qualitative writing on IPV, feminist outreach materials for survivors of intimate partner violence and their service providers, and strengths-based theory and clinical writing from the field of social work. This literature will be supplemented by selected offerings from journals dedicated to violence, nursing, and quantitative IPV and health literature.

*Limitations of the Review*

The lack of literature that directly addresses this area has simultaneously contributed to the significance of this research, as well as the limitations. The limitations in this section are accentuated by deficiencies in available writing that directly addresses the concept or experiences of relational resilience to IPV and the processes experienced by survivor-couples. The data reflecting the experiences of minorities and other underserved populations are lacking. This study also does not attempt to include relationships that have ceased to be violent. These concerns constitute the main limitations of this review.

Reflecting the dearth of literature directly related to survivor-couples of intimate partner violence, including the area of IPV, the bulk of available theoretical literature reviewed will be peripherally related. However, by applying resilience to this important
relational area, the gap in the literature will begin to be addressed. Because survivor-couples are unstudied (as is explored later in the chapter), the purpose of this paper is to support the existence of such relationships and their importance as a subject for further study.

This study is intended as an initial step to increase the available literature in this area as well as an invitation for future work. It is especially necessary for work in this area to recognize the likely impacts of environmental factors and various demographics, including sexual orientation, ethnicity and gender (Taylor, 2004; West, 2004; Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Recent articles by Taylor (2004) and West (2004) are particularly noteworthy for their rare recognition of the importance of race, class, social inequalities, intersectionality and gender as contexts that must not be ignored when examining the impact of IPV.

The impact of IPV may never completely disappear from a relationship, even if the battering has stopped (Kirkwood, 1993). Research has found that, after two years, even men who had reduced or ceased to commit physical acts of violence against their spouses had no reduction in levels of emotional abuse (Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Shortt, 1996). Conversely, survivor-couples are defined as having no history of violent power and control issues with each other. The focus of this paper is on couples with no history of relationship violence that are composed of one or more members who have survived such violence with prior partners. For this reason, literature on couples who seem to have ceased to be violent will not be examined in this paper. This is likely to limit the use of this concept for work with couples “who experience less severe abuse
and may wish to achieve nonviolence from within the relationship” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003, p. 177).

Limitations in this study stem from the lack of literature that focuses directly on the long-term relational resilience of IPV survivors and survivor-couples. This is reflected in the lack of information on minorities and other under-served populations. Additionally, this literature review does not include couples that have ceased to be violent, and so may have limited value in that area. This gap in the literature has dual impact of limiting the nature of this review while also increasing its importance to the fields of intimate partner violence, resilience, and strengths-based study. The relevant literature in these three areas will be explored next.

**Intimate Partner Violence**

This section will define Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and review literature in this area to create a groundwork for the context and relevance of this study. Statistics and prevalence rates will be combined with information on the long-term emotional and psychosocial impact of IPV on survivors. Finally, I will offer an overview of major feminist contributions to our understanding of IPV.

Intimate partner violence can be defined as “violence committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, or current or former boyfriend or girlfriend” (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003, p.3). Rates of IPV victimization are collected using a wide range of definitions, tools, and data sources, all of which impact the results (Desai & Saltzman, 2001). Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey state that for physical assault (including rape) alone, approximately 25% of surveyed women and 7.6% of surveyed men had been victimized by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
(Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). However, violence can occur in a variety of forms, all of which are significant regardless of whether they cause direct physical harm.

Figure 2.1, below, is an illustration of the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993). According to the Power and Control Wheel introduced by Pence & Paymar (1993), a component of The Duluth Model developed by battered women utilizing domestic violence resources, there are eight connected categories of IPV in addition to physical and sexual violence. These are: coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying and blaming; using children; male privilege; and economic abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993). While physical violence is an important part of IPV, it is only one aspect and is not required in order to consider the relationship violent, as the Wheel (below) demonstrates.
Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill a threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman’s life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.

Figure 2.1. Wheel of Power and Control
The multifaceted wheel from The Duluth Model (Pence & Paymar, 1993) provides a structured and illustrated understanding of IPV that is similar to Maturana’s (1986) definition of violence. If violence is considered the “attempt to impose one’s will upon another” (Maturana, 1986, as summarized in Sanders & Tomm, 1989, p.350), especially in a holistic manner such as that shown in the above wheel, then statistics based primarily on physical violence will be drastically inaccurate. For this reason, in addition to the widely accepted concern of underreporting for IPV, accurate statistics for the prevalence of IPV are not available (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

IPV occurs without regard to gender or sexuality, although it is most commonly and most intensely inflicted upon women by men (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Women may be at highest risk during adolescence, with rates of physical (both sexual and non-sexual) dating violence at 88% by the culmination of undergraduate studies (Smith & White, 2003). The costs and impacts of IPV on both individual and large-scale levels are extensive and ominous (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The immediate psychological effects of IPV victimization are sweeping and have been well-researched (see Campbell & Soeken 1999; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Brady, 1997; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995). IPV’s long-term consequences can negatively affect future relationships, especially due to the link
between abuse survival and increased risk of mental health concerns (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Golding, 1999).

The literature on the psychological impact of IPV depicts a dire image of the results of such violent acts. Waldrop and Resick (2004) note that “Abuse inflicted by an intimate partner is the source of a great deal of psychological distress for many women” (p.291). In addition to physical (including sexual), financial and other repercussions, victims suffer from a wide range of lingering psychological consequences, including (but not limited to) depression, trauma symptoms including anxiety disorders and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), self-harm and suicidality, eating disorders, guilt, shame, decreased self esteem, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and substance abuse, along with a variety of other stress-related concerns (Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). This is often linked to the severity, frequency and duration of the abuse (Dutton, Green, Kaltman, Roesch, Zeffiro & Krause, 2006). Women are more likely to experience PTSD, as it is linked to sexual violence, which is a common component of IPV (Brady, 1997). Those suffering from PTSD are less likely to be involved in a relationship (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995).

Such findings suggest that survivors will suffer from a reduced likelihood of engaging in positive future interpersonal relationships. A study on sexual and non-sexual forms of physical violence in dating relationships of college students showed once these women had experienced such violence they were increasingly likely to experience it
again (Smith & White, 2003). However, “...some manage to survive and emerge from abusive relationships with fewer negative outcomes than others” (Waldrop & Resick, 2004, p. 291). A survey that included 428 women currently in nonviolent relationships after experiencing violence in past relationships found that “consistent support from the current partner was significantly associated with a reduced risk of poor mental health, anxiety, and depression” (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002, p. 472). Resilience, and thus the concept of survivor-couples, accepts the possibility of the existence of both successful adaptation and “psychological difficulties, such as problems of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 548). Furthermore, the presence of negative psychosocial effects stemming from IPV is not universal, and the impact has not been well explored by researchers (Bogat, Levendosky, Theran, Von Eye & Davidson, 2003; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000, Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Few articles or books mention the impact of IPV survival on future relationships, and none could be found that were dedicated to the development, maintenance or healing impact of later nonviolent intimate relationships.

While some survivors feel hesitant to consider establishing future partnerships, others believe that they have gained skills and information that will help them to make better relationship choices in the future (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002). In spite of negative forecasts by existing research, survivors often engage in enjoyable and mutually beneficial new intimate relationships without re-victimization (Dugan & Hock, 2006).

Considering that a significant number of female domestic violence victims do not remain in violent relationships, there is a need for further long term services (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005) and research based on the recognition
that most survivors do not stay in abusive partnerships (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Walker, 1980; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns & Shortt, 1996; Taylor, 2002). In 1997, Weiss (2004) began interviewing women who had reconstructed their lives by leaving abusive partners. She discovered that there was no shortage of potential participants. “I met them everywhere: on airplanes, at conferences, in community board meetings, at religious services, in offices, schools and hospitals” (p. 5). Weiss (2004) found that many of the women she interviewed were able to thrive after the termination of the abusive relationship, and some established later nonviolent relationships. A study on female IPV survivors over 55, an age group with high rates of such violence, found that 15 of 38 did not remain in the abusive relationship (Zink, Jacobson, Pabst, Regan & Fisher, 2006).

Authors of feminist outreach and qualitative texts have penned numerous books to assist survivors in leaving their abusive partners. These texts include sections on developing future relationships (e.g. NiCarthy, 1986, 2004) as well as collections of narratives from survivors who have successfully escaped IPV (e.g. NiCarthy, 1986, 1987, 2004; Weiss, 2000; Anderson, 1997; Rosenberg, 2007). Although most of the women remain single in their narratives, some hope for positive future relationships and others share their success in creating new, nonviolent couples. Recently, there has also been an increase in research on IPV using samples that have terminated violent relationships some years in the past; such studies include limited information relevant to the development of the concept of survivor-couples (Taylor, 2004).

Intimate partner violence is certainly a tragic and all-too-common occurrence in couples. This review of the literature recognizes that physical, emotional and
psychosocial damage incurred by survivors can be great, yet some are able to go on to build nonviolent and successful future relationships, even though others do not. The literature would benefit greatly from the addition of research exploring the process of survivors who have succeeded in building such positive relationships, an area which has rarely been explored. By creating a framework for the prior experiences of violence, and the potential impact of those experiences, we can gain a better understanding of the context of survivor-couples. In order to more fully understand this concept, it is necessary to combine this background with information from the areas of resilience studies and strength-based approaches.

_Resilience and Survivor-Couples*

A focus on the negative impact of IPV has resulted in a body of literature that focuses on pathology and short term psycho-social implications in those who do not thrive. In order to expand the current body of knowledge, this study has combined the context of prior IPV with the concept of long-term relational resilience that is exhibited by survivor-couples. This section will define resilience and explore the foundational work in this area. It will conclude with an effort to broaden this typically individual-focused concept by applying it to romantic relationships.

Resilience refers to a *dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process. (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543)
The area of resilience studies has offered researchers, human service providers, and the public an alternative to a pathology-based perspective (Benard, 2006). Considering the potential for resilience offers these groups “a scarce commodity these days: hope” (Benard, 2006, p. 198). Resilience studies have done this by rejecting the deficit- and pathology-based focus in favor of exploring the variable impact of stressors and traumatic events (Benard, 2006; Weiss, 2004). By doing so, this area allows researchers to understand how and why some people are able to fare better than others who have similar experiences (Walsh, 1998, 2006). Furthermore, individuals who demonstrate higher resilience not only rebound from such occurrences, but emerge stronger and with a greater ability to utilize resources (Walsh, 1998). Resilience counters the assumption that some intimate relationships (among other interpersonal relationships) are so damaging that they must cause permanent damage and impairment to those involved (Rutter, 1994).

[Resilience] is an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge. The ability to overcome adversity challenges our culture’s conventional wisdom: that early or severe trauma can’t be undone; that adverse experiences always damage people sooner or later… (Walsh, 2006, p. 4)

According to Walsh (2006), resilience leads to a positive response that goes beyond survival. She notes that the term ‘survival’ can be applied to anyone who has escaped or made it through a particularly traumatic experience (Walsh, 1998). However, in recognition of feminist writing that urges researchers and service providers to recognize a wider range of forms of resistance and strengths utilized by women living with IPV (Davis, 2002; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gilfus, 1999; Anderson & Saunders,
2003), the term survivor-couple has been chosen for use in this paper in order to represent a non-violent relationship where one or both partners has/have left a previous, violent relationship. This term reflects the feminist notion that survival of IPV incorporates what Walsh (1998) would consider resilience, an experience beyond passively living through an experience and beyond victimhood. Sperlich and Seng (2008) mirror this choice of terminology with their own use of the phrase ‘survivor moms’ in their text on women who survive childhood abuse and later become mothers.

Traditionally, resiliency research has focused on individuals, especially children (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), and their ability to navigate and grow from disadvantageous environments and events. This focus on children progressed from a conceptualization of youth who continue to function appropriately in spite of families that functioned poorly in the examined areas, to a less problem-saturated view of familial relationships (Walsh 2003). This change in application and perspective, called family resilience, recognizes the importance of interpersonal relationships to resilience (Walsh, 2003). The concept of a survivor-couple suggests that this positive approach to parenting in family resiliency also applies to survivor-couples. Walsh supports the application of resilience concepts and studies to survivor-couples, noting Werner’s earlier work which followed disadvantaged children into adulthood and intimate relationships (personal communication, December 3, 2007).

Werner and Smith’s (1992) acclaimed longitudinal study based in resilience theory sampled over 500 Kauai children born in 1955 and tracked their resilience and vulnerability into adulthood. In addition to the educational status of their parents and some characteristics that were often considered to be genetically linked, several socially
related protective factors (also called buffers) were noted. Having supportive social networks, kin, religious faith, and engagement in transitional events with the potential for the building of improved social supports were all found to be key for individuals that demonstrated high resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992). Some of these transitional events included parenthood, educational and work accomplishments, joining a religious group, and membership in long-term, committed, intimate relationships.

Family resilience literature seems to suggest that traumatic events, along with their repercussions, usually occur while the individual is within the social and familial networks that assist in increased resiliency (Walsh, 2006). For example, Connolly’s (2005) unique research on relational resilience, *A Qualitative Exploration of Resilience in Long-Term Lesbian Couples*, provides data on lesbian survivor-couples and resilience to the impact of omnipresent homophobia and heterosexism.

The concept of resilience may also be applied to the continuing impact of events that are external or prior to the family or couple. In the specific case of IPV survivor-couples, this means that although the intimate relationship between the abuser and survivor has been terminated, survivor-couples may face the consequences of lingering effects and newly realized ramifications brought to the surface by day-to-day life (Golding, 1999; Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Kirkwood, 1993). Survivor-couples offer a consistent application of Bonanno’s (2004) writing on resilience. Bonanno (2004) noted that those who exhibit resilience are able to create and “maintain a stable equilibrium” (p. 20) in, or even improve, the quality of their relationship despite traumatic occurrences, instead of engaging in an on-going process of reduced functioning.
and recovery. In other words, these couples continue to maintain “positive adaptation… despite experiences of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543).

It is worth noting that there are some people who have experienced domestic violence but do not suffer any significant, lingering concerns (Bonanno, 2004). At the same time, the literature has established a strong case for the long-term physical and psychological impact of IPV (refer to the previous section). How are couples in which at least one member brings such concerns (while the other may have little understanding of what it means to be abused by a partner) able to heal, thrive, and maintain themselves as mutually enjoyable and beneficial? In the resilience model,

...it is assumed that no single model fits all families or their situations.

Functioning is assessed in context, i.e., relative to each family’s values, structure, resources, and life challenges… Processes for optimal functioning and the well-being of members are seen to vary over time, as challenges unfold and families evolve across the life-cycle. While no single model of family health fits all, a family resilience perspective is grounded in a deep conviction in the potential for family recovery and growth out of adversity. (Walsh, 2003, pp. 5-6)

According to Benard (2006), this is done through a process of identifying protective factors that make it possible for families to respond to negative events as “opportunities to engage their innate resilience and turn their lives around” (p. 199). In spite of the prevalence of deficit-based literature on IPV survivors (Bonanno, 2004), some research has demonstrated that this group both utilizes and creates “inner resources” during their experiences of abuse (Davis, 2002, p.1248). Survivor-couples are those who are able to “show tremendous resilience and thrive, even in the face of multiple stressors,
discrimination, and adversity” (Connolly, 2005, p.266). It follows that IPV survivors may possibly continue to thrive as they face the lingering effects of abuse, such as depression and substance abuse (Campbell & Soeken 1999; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002), when they occur during later, nonviolent relationships.

Walsh (2003) provides a concept map that organizes nine such key protective processes under three domains: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication/problem solving. The belief systems domain includes the processes: making meaning of adversity; positive outlook; and transcendence and spirituality. The organizational patterns domain includes: flexibility; connectedness; and social and economic resources. Clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving comprise the domain of communication/problem solving. All of these processes are highly psychosocial. As such, they are not simply useful information for parents and their communities about increasing children’s resiliency; they also apply to intimate relationships and their own social circles.

A recent study on coping mechanisms of female IPV survivors (Waldrop & Resick, 2004) suggests that factors including the level of dedication to preserving the relationship, supportive and responsive individuals and agencies, and the availability of resources are all related to greater success in the face of transitioning out of the violent relationship. Another study by Carlson, McNutt, Choi & Rose (2002) found that supportive others, health, self-esteem, financial status, education and employment all had the potential to be effective coping resources for women currently experiencing intimate partner violence, although they were less effective in situations of severe abuse. These
socially-linked factors further support Walsh’s domains and organizational patterns.

Humphreys (2003) found that, using a measure for individual resilience, women who escaped battering by utilizing a domestic violence shelter demonstrated high resilience levels that compared favorably to several other samples of people in distressing situations. It seems that there are, indeed, people who are able to escape violent relationships, exhibit resilience, and thrive in future life endeavors.

This section has offered an overview of the field of resilience study, focusing on its potential as a relational concept useful to the exploration of survivor-couples. It is likely that thriving nonviolent couples without members that have a history of prior IPV will succeed in many of Walsh’s processes. At the same time, data from the prior section on IPV would suggest that relationships that include a history of previous IPV victimization can be expected to struggle with most, if not all, of them. A deficit-focused perspective may highlight the possibility of victims seeking disastrous future partners and repeating failures in later relationships, a view which corresponds to the pathologizing nature of the bulk of IPV research (Bonanno, 2004). The application of resilience, however, can lead us to consider the same abusive relationship background from a more hopeful perspective. This perspective, which includes family resilience, offers the potential for abused individuals to be more aware of, and committed to, building relationships with strong resiliency processes. In this way, resiliency grants victims the potential to be beneficial to relationships, promoting the relationship instead of posing an undesirable risk to its success. As this literature demonstrates, the processes of resiliency can be considered a source of strengths. By combining resilience with social work’s strengths-based approach (Saleebey, 1996) we can create a deeper understanding of
survivor-couples. The addition of the strengths-based perspective can also yield a framework for collecting data on the survivor-couples by focusing on various aspects related to resilience.

Strengths-Based Approach and Survivor-Couples

By combining summaries of relevant IPV and resilience literature, I have offered a unique perspective on survivors of relationship violence that includes the potential for long-term psychosocial well-being. In order to develop this study, it was necessary to explore literature that would provide a framework for gathering data from this under-explored, non-pathologically focused position. The strengths-based perspective, from the field of social work, offers an applied approach that is useful in this area. In this section, I define and review the strengths-based perspective before exploring its potential applications to this study on the process of creating and maintaining survivor-couples.

The strengths-based perspective, originating from social work literature, is a systemic approach based on respect, hope and the ability to heal.

It denies that all people who face trauma and pain in their lives inevitably are wounded or incapacitated or become less than they might… All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes, however dashed and distorted these may have become through circumstance, oppression, and trauma. (Saleebey, 1996, p. 297)

From this standpoint, the focus on negative results and problem-saturated forecasts are replaced with a positive exploration of healing. Experiences of IPV victimization are recognized as a significant, intensely negative phenomenon, yet not as an insurmountable barrier to thriving future relationships. Conversely, prior characteristics combined with
insights and skills gained from traumatic experiences can yield positive results. These qualities do not negate the negative nature of experiences, but do aid people in moving on with their lives in the wake of such occurrences. According to strengths-based theorists, such as Saleebey (1996, 2001), strengths are the most influential factors in healing.

A strengths-based perspective is composed of five interconnected constructs: language, strengths, resilience, critical factors and community (Saleebey, 1996). Each of these facets aids in exploring what helps survivors, including IPV survivors, to rebuild functional, satisfying and fulfilling lives. Furthermore, the strengths-based perspective lends a second essential quality to the understanding of survivor-couples; these relationships do not involve survivors exploiting their partners for support without providing any positive influence on the relationship themselves. Indeed, these are mutually beneficial and enjoyable partnerships to which survivors make essential and important contributions while simultaneously experiencing healing and growth with their partners. Those who have experienced trauma, such as domestic violence victims, are not converted into individuals without the ability and desire to continue to contribute to their communities and relationships (Saleebey, 2002). This observation coincides with resilience research, which has shown that, for many families and individuals, experiencing traumatic events led to increases in strengths and resourcefulness (Walsh, 2003).

This section offers information from relevant literature on the strength-based approach and its applications to this study. By utilizing clinical and research techniques stemming from this perspective, researchers and outreach professionals (including therapists) may be able to successfully explore the phenomenon of survivor-couples.
Furthermore, those working with couples who are struggling with the continuing impact of previous violent relationships may be able to locate and enhance the potential for resilience by utilizing strengths-based interviewing and conversation. Such techniques also have the potential to lead to successful research with survivor-couples of intimate partner violence by lending an applied element to the literature that formed the basis for my study of survivor-couples. In order to complete my review of the literature, it was necessary to include an exploration of the foundational work done by feminist qualitative and outreach authors. This final portion of the literature offers an important context of history, ethical considerations, and advocacy that is an essential supplement to the study’s basis in literature on IPV, resilience, and the strengths-based approach.

_Feminist Outreach & Qualitative Literature_

The feminist movement has contributed a great deal of writing, including outreach and qualitative literature, on various aspects of IPV. While the feminist literature in these areas is also subject to a focus on prevention and crisis-response, as well as pathology, it does offer an essential context of awareness-raising and advocacy. Some qualitative offerings in this area have created a basis for the recognition of survivor-couples by publishing brief descriptions within presentations of interview data. This section will review the overlapping areas of feminist outreach and qualitative work relevant to research on survivor-couples, and explore how it can contribute to this study.

A review of the feminist outreach and qualitative research publications yields very little mention of the development of nonviolent, beneficial relationships after leaving abusive partners. Similar to the rest of the IPV literature, the chronological range of this area of the literature is largely limited to prevention efforts and ongoing abuse.
through the termination of the relationship (including by homicide) (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Crowell & Burgess (1996) illustrate a common approach in writing on the consequences of IPV for family and friends: the impact of IPV on children (as witnesses or direct victims, as well as victims of less functional parenting) is included, as is a brief statement about a likely decrease in social circles and communication with extended family. However, there is no mention of the positive or negative impact on future relationships. Similarly, Smith (2003) includes a wide range of themes from her interviews with survivors of past IPV, yet the only mention of later intimate relationships is in regards to a series of sexual flings.

Such long-term relationship accounts, though still under-explored, are more prevalent in literature on stranger and acquaintance rape or child sexual abuse. Ledray’s (1986) text, *Recovering from Rape*, divides each chapter into two sections; the first is labeled “To the Survivor” and the second “To the Significant Other.” Going a step further in recognizing the role of partners, Levine (1996) penned a book specifically for the partners of rape and incest survivors. Some books, such as Pierce-Baker’s *Surviving the Silence: Black Women’s Stories of Rape* (1998) provide narratives from women who were raped, usually while in an established relationship, and the impact of the event on the couple. A smaller section of the book includes narratives from partners and family members of rape victims.

Sperlich & Seng contribute their book *Survivor Moms: Women’s Stories of Birthing, Mothering and Healing after Sexual Abuse* (2008) to the literature. It contains brief sections on the impact of such abuse (mainly during childhood) on later relationships. Selections from interviews include tales of caring, supportive and healing
husbands as well as relationships that could not thrive in the face of challenges stemming from the prior abuse. Finally, a noteworthy quantitative study by Feinauer, Callahan, and Hilton (1996) on the impact of sexual abuse in childhood on later intimate relationships found that women in ‘successful’ couples may experience benefits, such as decreased depression, due to improved safety, interpersonal experiences, and reconnection. However, while intimate partner violence can include unwanted sex acts, child sexual assault and stranger or acquaintance rape, intimate partner violence has many unique qualities grounded in aspects of power and control that are only possible in couples (Pence & Paymar, 1993). This renders these different types of violence unsuitable for direct comparison.

A small number of outreach and qualitative research (which may also be outreach) texts briefly mention the possibility or presence of later, nonviolent relationships. Doane’s (1996) unique outreach guide for women who have recently left violent relationships gives suggestions for finding new partners. Readers are encouraged to carefully consider general, positive characteristics that potential boyfriends must possess, but the text does not include any information about relational healing or how to work together through any negative impact of the prior IPV. It is also intended for abused women seeking new heterosexual relationships and does not address same-sex attracted people or those of other genders.

NiCarthy’s (1986) guide to leaving and moving on also gives a small amount of space to the topic of later, nonviolent relationships for IPV survivors. She recognizes that dating after leaving an abuser may be beneficial, stating that “such a relationship can be helpful in getting you through the rough times after your separation from the batterer”
(p.221). In the book’s fourth edition (2004), this statement has been removed and replaced with a longer, hopeful statement:

They say there’s nothing like a new romance to heal the wounds of the old one. If you’re lucky and careful enough to find a man [sic] who treats you well, your lonely hours may be reduced to a tolerable level. You’ll have concrete evidence that men [sic] can be loving and affectionate without threatening or abusing you. (NiCarthy, 2004, p. 211)

Later in the book, however, she mirrors Doane; NiCarthy backs away from the potential for the creation of survivor-couples, by following that hopeful note with a caution. Women should not, she warns, reveal the abusive nature of previous relationships for fear that he (the new partner) will use that knowledge against her later, and think of her as someone who can be controlled, even if he would not otherwise do so (1986, 2004).

In 1987, NiCarthy also published a collection of narratives entitled *The Ones Who Got Away*. This title included a series of biographies from survivors. Out of thirty-three narratives, only six that mention positive later relationships could be found. Often, too little information is given to determine whether these are simply nonviolent relationships that were built in spite of each survivor’s previous abuse (perhaps without informing the new partner of the prior abuse), or whether they take on the more strengths-based nature of survivor-couples. At the end of the book, NiCarthy includes a section of approximately three pages in the summary called ‘New Partners.’ She comments on two stories, noting that the women in them “were helped through difficult times by their new lovers” (1987, p. 321). This is the only sentence in the summary that may refer to the existence of survivor-couples.
In feminist writing, there are reasons for this gap that differ from mainstream research’s usual focus on pathology. Throughout history all but the most heinous acts of domestic violence were considered an acceptable, even desirable, aspect of committed intimate relationships (Walker 1980). Over the latter half of the previous century the feminist movement worked diligently to create awareness of the importance, prevalence, intolerability and intertwined forms of IPV (Walker 1980). According to Walker, during this time women were simultaneously held responsible for reducing undesirable levels of violence in their relationships while being denied access to the resources (including power) to effectively do so. It is understandable, then, that feminist researchers do not heavily emphasize the existence of survivor-couples, to avoid being construed as encouraging the view that women must be in a relationship in order to be complete or healthy.

The exploration of structural patriarchy’s promotion and acceptance of violent control by men over women has been essential to the movement against domestic violence (Jasinski, 2001; Horsfall, 1991; Russo, 2001). It is important to state that survivor-couples, especially heterosexual survivor-couples, are also impacted by structural patriarchy; no individual, relationship or community is exempt from the influence of such a deeply rooted, unilateral cultural phenomenon (Jasinski, 2001; Russo, 2001; Kivel 1992). As part of their commitment to nonviolence, survivor-couples of all gender compositions must continually work to avoid and reduce patriarchy’s influence on their relationship. One must additionally note that the concept of survivor-couples does not contradict the ability of survivors to have resilience and develop strengths in contexts other than couplehood, nor does it conflict with the established benefits of developing a

In order to communicate the dire reality of IPV, the feminist movement has offered a range of awareness-raising texts and studies on the experience of survivors, including the influential book *The Battered Woman* (Walker, 1980). Seminal texts such as this introduced the complex results of the emotional abuse that accompanies such physical assaults with concepts such as battered women’s syndrome. These books helped to bring the experience of IPV to the public sphere, and inspired a wave of later work in this area.

While the feminist movement has been largely effective in facing the momentous task of raising awareness of the impact of IPV, especially on female IPV survivors, it is important to recognize that survivors have not lost all other aspects of their identity. Monumental social change in the areas of awareness-raising, prevention, and support for survivors of IPV has been brought about through the efforts of the feminist movement. However, this work is not complete without additional effort in the area of recovery. By combining the advocacy from this area of the literature with the prevalence and descriptive data from other research on IPV, we gain a broader understanding of IPV and its role in relationships and society. This can be combined with the non-pathologized and hopeful perspective of resilience studies, and the applied focus of the strength-based approach to create a well-rounded basis for the study of survivor-couples. This exploration builds on very limited, yet important, examples of survivor-couples that are a part of the existing literature.
Examples of Survivor-Couples in Literature

In spite of this chapter’s discussion of the inadequate amount of research on the experiences of survivor-couples, there are some limited illustrations of their experiences in the literature. These were mostly discovered in feminist outreach and qualitative publications, some of which were not written specifically for an academic audience. This section will review studies and books which support the existence of survivor-couples with quantitative and qualitative data, thereby offering a limited foundation for further research in this area.

Recent decades have seen a steady increase in literature focusing on the stories of women who have left abusive partners; these women were interviewed at various points in the process of rebuilding and moving on. An analysis of 28 qualitative studies in this area by Anderson and Saunders (2003) found only 7 with “a somewhat considerable portion of space on the aftermath of separation” (p.177), with just 4 specifically focusing on this time frame. Most of these did not include concepts directly related to survivor-couples. Due to this gap in this literature, the literature sources that follow have not focused on survivor-couples, or later nonviolent relationships of any type. Most of their narratives do not mention the goals or realities of finding or maintaining new relationships. However, the following books and articles do contain brief statements and short descriptions on these topics.

Throughout the survivor literature there are the words of women (all IPV survivor stories that could be found were from women) who hope to someday find “a successful marriage. A healthy marriage” (from an interview in Taylor, 2004, p. 42). These women are not (yet) a part of a survivor-couple, but they believe that positive new relationships
may be possible for them and hope to eventually move toward one. This may not be expressed as a primary goal, as in Taylor’s (2004) interviews with African American women. “Several participants mentioned a readiness for partnerships with men, but overall this was not desired until other goals were accomplished” (p. 42). Kimberly’s story, from Anderson’s (1997) *A Woman Like You*, which combines brief narratives with a large photo of the interviewee looking directly at the reader, is summarized by the author with the final line, “She still believes that there are many good men out there who are capable of having healthy, loving relationships” (p. 46).

Anderson’s (1997) photography and interview book also offers summarizing statements at the conclusion of two separate narratives that support the presence of survivor-couples. At the conclusion of Diane’s story it says, “She and her grown children have a loving and supportive relationship with her second husband” (p. 34). For Kathi’s summary remark, Anderson writes, “Recently married, her husband is patient and supportive with her lingering fears” (p. 66).

NiCarthy (1987) offers a summary with some direct quotes that may describe a survivor-couple:

Ruth and Donna worked together and they “sort of courted,” but never had sex. Ruth was enjoying her freedom and never wanted to be in a relationship again. She was willing to be just friends indefinitely, even though she was attracted to Donna, but Donna finally decided she wanted more than a nonsexual relationship, and persuaded Ruth to go into therapy. Ruth’s “flashbacks” of her experiences with Robin made it difficult for her to develop a sexual relationship, but Donna
was gentle and patient and after a long time Ruth began to feel good about making love. (p. 236)

These summaries demonstrate the potential for women to seek and establish survivor couples, but offer few direct quotes on these later relationships. Although they are rare, illustrative quotes (all from women) of apparent survivor-couples can be found in the literature. These statements are often brief and contain few details.

Weiss’s *Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who Broke Free* (2000, 2004) offered a direct quote illustrating the existence of survivor-couples in each of two editions. One interviewee shared that she has not been in a violent relationship for fifteen years, during which time she married “a wonderful guy” (Weiss, 2004, p. 3) and became a mother. Another noted that she proposed to her boyfriend after discovering after his caring nature had helped her to learn to trust him (Weiss, 2000).

NiCarthy (1987) also conducted interviews with IPV survivors, three of which contained mentions of survivor-couples. ‘Allie’ discussed her relationship with ‘Lonnie,’ emphasizing that their communication patterns allowed them to be able to work through problems. She noted that “I’m here because I want to be” (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 66). ‘Lou’ said that she shares household tasks with her current husband, and that she was able to keep the parts of her life that she enjoyed while she was single (NiCarthy, 1987). Finally, NiCarthy (1987) also interviewed ‘Dee’, who is married to ‘Tex.’ Tex has been very supportive of Dee’s recovery from her prior abusive relationship, and they enjoy a calm relationship based on a mutual appreciation for their church, music and literature. She concludes by stating, “I can’t say that we do anything that would excite anybody else but we sure have a hell of a good time” (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 145).
Few studies have focused on the period of time after the termination of the violent relationship, including single-hood and any eventual nonviolent relationships (Anderson and Saunders, 2003). However, a careful examination of research and outreach texts can yield summaries and direct quotes that support the existence of IPV survivor-couples. The results of interviews with these women demonstrate it is possible to create and maintain a thriving nonviolent relationship after the termination of a violent partnership. Combined with prior sections of this chapter, these illustrations offer a cornerstone upon which to develop further research that specifically explores the processes involved in the development and continuation of survivor-couple relationships.

Applications

Substantial research and theory work is required if the concept of survivor-couples is to prove useful to such couples and those that work with them. It cannot be assumed that the process of resilience supported by research on individual development is identical to the relational process of resilience of couples. In order to explore this concept, more research is necessary. With that in mind, the development of “IPV survivor-couples” as a term for the extension of resilience to the relational aspect of intimate partnerships has potential applications for the areas of research, couples therapy, and community outreach.

Further research is called for to identify and explore the processes of couples’ resilience. Long-term longitudinal research on individual survivors of IPV, including their own resilience and the state of their future relationships, is needed to gain a better understanding of IPV’s psychosocial impacts. Qualitative research on the lived experiences of IPV survivors should also be conducted over a wider range of time,
instead of ceasing soon after the termination of the relationship. Research questions stemming from the strengths-based perspective, including relational questions, offer a uniquely hopeful alternative to both methodologies and increase the breadth of knowledge in these areas.

Perhaps because of a lack of longitudinal studies on IPV survivors (Campbell & Soeken, 1999), therapists and their fellow outreach professionals are guided by a body of knowledge that lacks both hope and a broad understanding inclusive of positive outcomes. The over-utilization of samples who display pathologies and who seek psychotherapy results in deficit-based theories, treatments and forecasts (Bonanno, 2004). This contrasts with the strengths-based perspective, which recognizes both traumatic experiences and the presence of hope and agency at the same time (Saleebey, 1996). For many, IPV victimization is an intensely negative part of life, but also one that eventually ceases to dominate their lives (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Rutter, 2004). Service providers and survivors both need the hope that knowledge of this fact can bring, as well as information on facilitating and easing the transition out of violent relationships.

Survivors who transition out of violent relationships and into thriving, nonviolent couple-hood are not the only ones ignored by the clinical and research literature. Members of survivor-couples who have not experienced IPV can only be presumed to exist, due to the lack of research with this population. What are the experiences of these partners? Do they provide support, and if so, what forms are the most useful? What contributions do such partners make to their relationships, and what benefits do they receive? Qualitative research can be utilized to establish a groundwork of knowledge.
The experiences of members in survivor-couples from this perspective are essential to the development and understanding of relational resilience.

According to the literature previously reviewed, the value of a consistently supportive partner to the mental health and well-being of IPV survivors is great (Carlson, McNutt, Choi & Rose, 2002). This support entails more than just the opportunity for survivors to share their thoughts and feelings; it requires active participation from the partner (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002). The specifics of this necessary participation must be explored and elaborated upon. At the same time, nothing is known about the needs of those who are called to provide this support, or about the benefits received from it. Further research on this process may bear a strong influence on clinical work with couples.

Those who work with survivors of IPV know the importance of hope to their clients. It is possible that couples who are struggling with the lingering impact of external IPV could benefit from well-informed therapeutic interventions. By focusing on the processes involved in creating and maintaining relational resilience, therapists may be able to better help these relationships to become ones of survivor-couples. The impact of greater knowledge gained from non-clinical samples, combined with a hopeful focus on the development and enhancement of strengths, holds great potential for increasing the success of couples therapy for this population.

Finally, the concept of survivor-couples holds significant potential for the development of intentional communities of survivor-couples. Great progress has been made in breaking down the silence and seclusion that surrounds the existence and experiences of domestic violence, including the creation of community-run support
groups. Awareness-raising events, featuring survivors who share their stories publicly, exist across the country. Do survivor-couples also desire a community of similar couples? Without the knowledge that others exist, there can only be isolation. The creation of the concept of survivor-couples offers a starting place for the creation of supportive, awareness-raising, and celebratory communities.

**Conclusion**

The study of resilience, with its focus on the strengths and processes that support the ability to thrive in the face of potentially destructive experiences, has provided a realistic and data-supported context of hope for IPV therapists, researchers, survivors and their partners. The relational resilience demonstrated by IPV survivor-couples is an area in need of exploration and development within the family resilience, strengths-based, and IPV-focused feminist qualitative and feminist outreach literatures. By recognizing the existence of these couples with the creation of the terminology to depict them, a basis can be created for further research, clinical work, and community building in this area. Improvements in these areas can create positive images of survival and resilience, support changes in gendered stereotypes, and assist survivor-couples and those who work with them in understanding the healing process from a strengths-based perspective.

This study utilizes the concept of the IPV survivor-couple by conducting interviews with a member of the couple that has experienced IPV. The interviews conducted offer valuable information that will supplement the literature on IPV and offer an important exploration into this under-addressed area. It will also serve as an important foundation for my own long term program of research. Through careful construction,
data collection and analysis this study will reveal important and potentially useful findings.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), who are now in later non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship of at least one year in duration. By examining mature, committed IPV survivor-couples through the perspective of the abuse survivor, it was possible to demonstrate that such couples exist. These participants, and their relationship, displayed psychosocial resilience through their ability to thrive in spite of any lingering impact from the prior, violent relationship, as described in the previous chapter. The application of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) allowed me to use demographic and interview data to explore how eleven survivors were able to co-create and maintain new, non-violent relationships despite any negative long-term effects of prior Intimate Partner Violence. These new relationships may be referred to as “survivor-couples of intimate partner violence.”

Many factors differed between participants, including the circumstances of the previous violence, resources available and demographics. At the same time, the discovery of shared themes among these stories may offer guidance to both professionals and laypersons invested in the success of survivors and their later relationships. By adding a new dimension to the existing literature, this research has expanded what is known about Intimate Partner Violence, survivors, their later nonviolent partners and survivor-couple relationships.
**Ethical Considerations**

This study relied on interviews with survivors of intimate partner violence who left the violent relationship and are now in a committed, nonviolent relationship that began at least a year ago. The experience of surviving domestic violence can be intense, and asking others to share stories of their past abuse and the process of the transition into a different relationship was handled with careful thought and a dedication to the well-being of participants.

My experience and training in working with survivors of IPV prepared me for recognizing the sensitive nature of this project. It also allowed me to enter the field with increased awareness and theoretical sensitivity, which is defined as “an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 41). This study was approached from a strengths-based perspective, which, according to Saleeby (1996), is a perspective that incorporates both struggle and thriving as a response to traumatic events. In taking this approach, I sought to avoid bringing further trauma to my participants by recognizing that their identity is not limited to their experiences of abuse, nor are their potential for growth and psychosocial well-being. In order to participate, interviewees had to have terminated their violent relationship far enough in the past to have established a nonviolent relationship at least a year ago. I was prepared, both with outside resources and prior training in my work as a IPV outreach and crisis response worker and also as a couple and family therapist with IPV survivors in case participants became distressed. Assistance was not needed during interviews or after, to the best of my knowledge, and most participants expressed excitement and optimism regarding the experience of being interviewed and none had significant difficulties during the process. All participants
received a list of resources that they could use in case of later distress or to assist fellow survivors of IPV.

It was essential that only individuals who wished to share their stories participate in this research. By publishing a call for research and allowing potential participants to either ignore it or express interest, I minimized the risk of participant coercion. Published calls for research included a website listing both basic information regarding the study and criteria for participation. The phone screening script provided further information.

My role as an interviewer separated me from offering therapeutic or outreach services, aside from any potentially therapeutic benefits of the interviews. While I endeavored to create a non-hierarchical relationship with participants, I was aware that I may have been perceived as having greater or lesser power and made efforts during recruitment and interviewing to be sensitive to these considerations and to verify and act in the best interest of my participants. Each participant was compensated with two movie passes at the conclusion of the initial interview.

At the end of their interviews, most participants remarked that they enjoyed thinking and talking about my questions. Most also ended the interview noting that they were looking forward to having the findings made public as a dissertation and perhaps through later publications and presentations. No participants dropped out of the study or expressed a level of distress worthy of concern. In fact, although some shared tears, all smiled often during their interviews, especially while speaking about their current relationships.
Methodological Framework

In order to address the research questions, it was necessary to design a strengths-based study suitable for exploring processes and meanings with a population that is rarely addressed in the literature and has experienced potentially traumatic interpersonal events. The strengths-based approach is commonly associated with clinical social work (Saleebey, 2006), as well as post-modernist approaches to Couple and Family Therapy (Polkinghorne, 2003), it is also used in research that may later influence such psychotherapeutic work (Saleebey, 2006). This is apparent in the work of researchers such as Canda, who conducted interviews with chronically ill adults in order to explore the importance of spirituality to their emotional resilience (Canda, 2006). Qualitative research is appropriate for the study of previously unexplored phenomena, topics that are considered sensitive and may evoke considerable emotion, and for gathering information from the perspectives of participants on their construction of meaning (Padgett, 1998, Marshal & Rossman, 2006). Because of the nature of Intimate Partner Violence, and the lack of research done on survivor-couples, qualitative methodologies were called for in this research.

The field of qualitative research includes a vast array of approaches to data collection and analysis, the most foundational of which include life histories, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, case studies, conversation analysis and Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2007, Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For this study, Charmaz’s (2006) approach to Grounded Theory was chosen. Although the founders of Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss, eventually took their work in two somewhat differing directions (Charmaz, 2000), together they created an innovative, detailed and flexible
format for the discovery of new theory grounded in data instead of a priori hypotheses. Grounded Theory creates an emergent theory that is

...inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23)

The combination of Glaser’s dedication to “dispassionate empiricism, rigorous codified methods, emphasis on emergent discoveries, and... specialized language that echoes quantitative methods” (Charmaz, 2006, p.7), with Strauss’s view of “human beings as active agents in their lives and in their worlds rather than as passive recipients of larger social forces” (Charmaz, 2006, p.7) yielded an effective and relevant perspective for the exploration of processes in this research. This study addressed an area that is virtually untouched by current research, and “grounded theory is a methodology that has been used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge” (Goulding, 1998, p.51).

Charmaz (2006) contributes a Constructivist perspective to traditional Grounded Theory that questions the objectivist perspective that considers data to be static in the face of outside influences, and instead allows researchers to consider traditionally feminist and deconstructionist concepts such as the role of the researcher and the sociocultural and chronological context of the study. Furthermore, Charmaz offers a
detailed and well-known set of guidelines and considerations that are inclusive of the
needs of researchers working within academia. In doing so, she interprets and presents
Glaser and Strauss’s dynamic theory for contemporary researchers while remaining
dedicated to the founders’ original tenets.

The focus on process and the recognition of past experiences and knowledge as
data maintains the qualities of Grounded Theory and distinguishes it from other models,
such as Phenomenology (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992). This process-oriented focus
across experiences draws upon constructivism, which “assumes the relativism of multiple
social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the
viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz,
2000, p.510). According to Gergen & Gergen (2008), this mutuality of influence among
realities is more accurately defined as constructionism than constructivism, but they
acknowledge that these terms are often used interchangeably. Regardless of terminology,
a foundation in this concept allowed the study to explore the processes inherent in the
socially co-constructed transition from violent to nonviolent relationships and cultural
implications related to experiences of IPV.

In order to allow new theory to emerge from the data, Grounded Theory supports
the delay of significant background research until after the data gathering and analysis
has begun, although some background work is expected (Charmaz, 2006). Doctoral
candidates are generally required to do detailed literature reviews in their field of study
before engaging in the dissertation research. A significant review of the literature was
done in order to propose this study before beginning it; however, there was little data
available on the experiences of survivor-couples, allowing at least partial adherence to
the Grounded Theory practice of entering the field without the influence of existing theories.

Despite this initial emphasis on avoiding prior research, Grounded Theory does not attempt to bracket or purge prior knowledge and experiences (Charmaz, 2006). This background information is also considered a type of data, and is utilized by the researcher in order to gain a better understanding of the processes being explored (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992). As detailed later in the reflexivity statement, I have received substantial training and experience with survivors of domestic violence, which has led to a strong belief in the potential for health and healing. This respect for the potential resiliency of IPV survivors influenced my understanding of the phenomena to include the possibility of thriving in psychosocial endeavors, such as later nonviolent relationships. These data impacted the research questions for the study which, in turn, dictated the nature of the interview questions.

In order to ensure that interview questions respected the potential for the self-righting nature of humanity in response to harm and resisted the deficit-based bias of the literature reviewed, the open-ended questions drew from Saleeby’s (1996) elements of strengths-based perspective. This basis in the strengths-based approach allowed for a more neutral approach from which pathology, resilience, or a combination of both could (and did) emerge. Meanwhile, an appreciation of the implications of power (Crotty, 2005), through the recognition of the contexts of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and socioeconomic status, was encouraged by Charmaz’s constructionist approach to Grounded Theory.
Grounded Theory, as interpreted and presented by Charmaz, formed the foundation and structure of all stages of this research. Constructionist Grounded Theory allowed the study to create interpretive findings that resisted positivism’s potential for “narrow, reductionist explanations with simplistic models of action” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 126). This was particularly fitting for an area of study in which a large number of negative predictions have been offered without sufficient grounding in research. While previous theories, such as family resilience, were reviewed in the literature to justify further research, Grounded Theory does not seek to test any theoretical assumption. Instead, Grounded Theorists are open to the emergence of new theory and then compare the data-based results to existing literature (Charmaz 2006).

Sample Selection

This study sought neither a sample that was in a state of crisis related to surviving ongoing domestic violence nor one that was trying to escape it. Participants were no longer engaged in a romantic relationship with the abuser, and were settled into a committed, peaceful relationship. Potential participants were likely to have moved on in many ways and might not identify as “survivor,” “abused,” or “victim of domestic violence.” I anticipated (correctly) that these potential participants could be difficult to recruit, yet that it would be possible to find participants willing to share their stories and reflections.

Grounded Theorists attempt to gather data until they are saturated, which is to say that no new concepts emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Participation was not limited based on previously collected data, and instead was left unrestricted in order to maximize the opportunity for unique data. This approach to data collection within
Grounded Theory is termed Open Sampling by Strauss and Corbin (1990). It may also be considered purposive or criterion sampling, because a very specific sub-section of the general population was recruited (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I anticipated recruiting a sample of approximately ten to fifteen participants for this study, based on sample sizes for other single or double-researcher Grounded Theory studies using interviews with individuals. Brott and Myers (1999) and Jones and McEwen (2000), for example, studied school counselors and college women, respectively, with samples sizes of ten. An unpublished dissertation by Levy (2008) on homosexuality and Christianity noted that she had reached saturation at thirteen subjects, but she included two additional participants to ensure data saturation. Another recent qualitative study, which was analyzed using components of Grounded Theory, collected data through semi-structured interviews with seven female survivors of previous intimate partner violence (Flinck, Paavilainen & Astedt-Kurki, 2005). For all of these studies, the final number was dependent on the richness of the data collected and on the process of theory-building and data saturation (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992; Charmaz, 2006).

It was a struggle to recruit participants in a timely manner, and this ultimately contributed to the final sample size of 11. However, after careful analysis, it became clear that this number also achieved data saturation by demonstrating considerable overlap in developing an emergent theory related to the research questions. This may have been aided by a thorough and somewhat lengthy interview guide. Although the final sample size was similar to what I had anticipated, Grounded Theory and purposive sampling make it impossible to know the exact size in advance (Schreiber & Stern, 2001; Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006).
Table 3.1. Sampling Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampling Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.) IPV survivors in dyadic intimate relationships that self-identify as having a committed and nonviolent relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.) Do not expect a separation or termination of the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.) Have not experienced IPV in the current relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. IPV is defined as experiencing at least one of the aspects represented on The Wheel of Power and Control, created by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.) Participants are willing and able to be interviewed one time for up to 3 hours, with a potential follow-up interview of up to 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.) Participants can be interviewed within 60 miles of Athens, GA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.) Participants are willing to have their interview/s audio-recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.) Participants are not currently involved in psychotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.) Participants are 21 years old or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.) Participants have been in their current intimate relationship for at least one year.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The sampling criteria, listed above in Table 3.1, Sampling Criteria, operationalized a committed couple as one that is dyadic in nature, and that does not anticipate a termination of the relationship. Potential participants also had to self-identify as having been in violent relationships in the past, while currently being in a nonviolent relationship. IPV is defined as consisting of the categories and behaviors reaching
beyond physical violence, as detailed by the Wheel of Power and Control, a copy of which was given to participants before they signed the consent form at the initial meeting. The time frame of one year was set as the minimum relationship duration in order to assure that participants had ample time to develop a committed relationship. Research suggests that intimate relationships change in nature, becoming more mature, after seven months (Aron, Fisher, Mashek, Strong, Li & Brown, 2005). One year allowed ample time for such a change to occur. The other sampling criteria, such as location of interview and willingness to be audio taped, were necessary for data gathering to occur.

It is important that those using Grounded Theory seek participants from a variety of sources, in order to assure some variation within the sample (Schreiber & Stern, 2001). Recruitment took the form of notices in organizational and mainstream publications, as well as online forms of media and flyers; these efforts attempted to reach potential participants of diverse ethnic, religious, sexual, financial and gender statuses. The following table shows the recruitment efforts that were made and the resulting calls and participants associated with each. Recruitment began in September, 2008 and continued through January, 2009. It is possible that the recruitment post was distributed in additional ways, or after January, by participants and those who viewed announcements. Additional avenues were sought, including more churches and agencies, but those that did not respond to requests are not listed. Recruitment efforts and their success rates are illustrated below, in Table 3.2, Recruitment Methods.
Table 3.2. Recruitment Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Approx. Dist.</th>
<th>Calls</th>
<th>Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email announcements to gatekeepers personally known to me (by recipient)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classified listing in free local paper, The Flagpole</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online social networking announcements (direct recipients)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.CraigsList.com">www.CraigsList.com</a> announcements</td>
<td>3 posts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDC parenting listservs (by subscribers)</td>
<td>2000+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball from participants</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA Intercultural Affairs digest listserv (by subscribers)</td>
<td>5000+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Safe newsletter (by subscribers)</td>
<td>350+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyers: businesses, downtown, UGA campus</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church announcements (LGBT Christian)</td>
<td>1 church</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA Marketplace graduate student listserv (weekly)</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA GLOBES (LGBT faculty) listserv</td>
<td>1 posts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA CHFD graduate student listserv</td>
<td>3 posts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the commencement of recruiting I anticipated a high response rate from the Project Safe newsletter, which is sent seasonally by the local domestic violence shelter to volunteers, donors, and other stakeholders who presumably have an interest in IPV survivors. Administrators at the shelter hypothesized that many of their subscribers might be interested in the study because they had also survived IPV. Much to our surprise, there were no responses to the call for participants in the Fall/Winter newsletter;
this precipitated a greater range and intensity of recruitment efforts than originally anticipated. As recruitment continued, it became clear that potential participants were more likely to respond to the call if it came from a trusted mutual acquaintance that could vouch for my intentions and awareness. This is noted above as email and social networking site announcements. Several interviewees confirmed this conclusion by stating that they participated because they knew me, or because they heard about the study from someone they trusted who also knew me.

Potential participants responded to the research announcement by possibly viewing the flyer online or in person and then calling for more information. Upon establishing communication by phone (which sometimes took several calls), I reviewed the purpose of the study using a standardized phone script and reading the sampling criteria. This script is shown below, in Table 3.3, Standardized Phone Script.

Interested potential participants who fit the sampling criteria were invited to set an interview appointment. Interviews took place at a location of the interviewee’s choice, within reasonable driving distance of Athens, GA. At the beginning of the interview, participants received a copy of The Wheel of Power and Control, IPV experiences survey, a demographic questionnaire, two consent forms, and a list of local or national resources for assistance with past or current IPV. The interviews were then conducted using a semi-structured interview guide.
Table 3.3. Standardized Phone Script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standardized Phone Script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for calling to learn more about this study. My name is Ruth Neustifter and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, working under Dr. Lewis. We’re both in the department of Child and Family Development. I do research and volunteer with survivors of domestic violence. To me violence means a lot more than hitting, such as emotional, verbal and financial things. I’m especially interested in learning about how survivors successfully make the transition from a violent relationship to a nonviolent one. For this study, I’ll be interviewing survivors like that who are interested in telling me a little bit about their past, violent relationship but mostly about their experiences in the non-violent relationship. Little is known about survivors of intimate partner violence who later have nonviolent relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eleven participants were interviewed for this study. These individuals included 10 women and one man, ranging from 23 to 56 years of age. One participant identified as homosexual, one as bisexual, and nine as heterosexual. Nine identified as White or Caucasian, one identified herself as Black, and one identified herself as both White and Native American. Participants ranged in educational level from some college coursework through at least one graduate degree. A table giving information about each participant, organized by pseudonym, is available in (Appendix A), and a further description is included in the next chapter.
Data Collection

Interviewees responded to one of four calls for participants (Appendix B), sometimes after viewing a webpage at www.SurvivorCouples.com (Appendix C) with additional information on sampling criteria, or flyers posted in various locations that were identical to the webpage. After a brief phone screening (Appendix D) designed to provide further information, answer questions, and confirm that the sampling criteria were met, an appointment for a taped interview was made. Data were collected from participants using the initial phone screening, a demographic survey (Appendix E), and through the interview guide (Appendix F). Data were primarily collected through these semi-structured interviews. The information gathered from the phone screening was only used to determine eligibility, and was not analyzed. Participants also received educational and assistance-providing resources for IPV (Appendix G), unrelated to data collection. Data collection was done within a Grounded Theory methodology.

According to Charmaz’s (2006) interpretations of Glaser and Strauss’s work with Grounded Theory, in-depth interviewing offers a compelling opportunity for researchers to balance directiveness with openness in interviewing. Charmaz notes that such interviews may be process-focused, and based roughly on chronology. Each interview may include a different selection and order of questions, depending on the participants’ answers. Questions should allow participants to give unexpected and diverse answers, while offering guidance for study of the research questions. Charmaz also suggests a range of open-ended questions to choose from in order to allow maximal (yet ethical) flexibility during the interview. Probing questions are utilized to draw out additional
information based on what the interviewee reveals, allowing for further depth in interviewing.

In the same text, Charmaz (2006) offers a sample interview with open-ended questions designed to explore a generic life change. This interview contains a total of 31 questions, divided into initial, intermediate and ending questions. Similarly, my interview included 33 questions and also sought to end on a pleasant or neutral note as the questions moved from individual and past-focused (violent relationship) to externalized (community) and present-focused (nonviolent relationship). The interview guide for this study reflected the length and general structure of Charmaz’s (2006) sample interview for grounded theorists.

In order to offer myself further structure and grounding within strengths-based practice, I found it useful to take guidance from Saleebey’s (1996) writing on areas of strengths. The sections of my interview guide titled “strengths,” “resilience,” and “community” all reflected areas of his work. Respectively, these: assessed strength areas; focused on expressions and processes of gleaning positive aspects from negative situations (including further developing one’s own characteristics); and looked at the interaction between the interviewee and her or his larger community. All of these sections inquired about engaged-in behaviors and meaning-making, both of which are important to Grounded Theory interviewing (Charmaz, 2006). These were supplemented by suggested questions (New Partnership for Children and Families, 2004) drawn from Saleebey (2002).

This structuring was done to support an orderly, yet suitably unrestricted approach to Grounded Theory interviewing. Each question was also carefully created in order to
gather background information and to explore the research questions. It is important to remember that probing questions and responses are a necessary part of exploring the research questions, while the initial interview guide is designed to be open and offer minimal, but necessary, direction and structure (Charmaz, 2006). Below, Table 3.4, Interview Guide, shows the interview guide that was used for this study.

Table 3.4. Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Guide</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A - Prior Relationship &amp; Transition Out</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. So, how did you decide to participate in this study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. As you know, this interview will have questions about both your experiences in your past, violent relationship/s, and your current, nonviolent relationship. May I ask you to tell me about that/those violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you describe that/those relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did you come to realize that it/they was/were violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How did you talk to others about that/those relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For many people it takes some time to recover from that kind of relationship, especially to the point of having new, nonviolent relationships. Could you tell me about what it was like for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How were you able to transition into a non-violent relationship, considering everything that happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What do you tell others about the violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What do you tell others about your transition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **B - Between Relationships** |
| 1. Was there any time when you were single between your violent and nonviolent relationships? |
| 2. Please tell me about what it was like to be out of the violent relationship/s and single. |
## Interview Guide

### C - Nonviolent Relationship
1. Now you are in a nonviolent relationship. Is this your first nonviolent relationship since the violent one/s?
2. How did you come to realize that this is a nonviolent relationship?
3. How would you describe this relationship?
4. How do you talk to others about this relationship?
5. Tell me about any ways the things from the violent relationship/s have popped up in this relationship, good or bad.
6. How do you respond to them?
7. What kinds of conversations do the two of you have about that/those prior relationship/s?
8. How do others talk about your current relationship?

### D - Strengths
1. When you’re going about your day and you just sort of start thinking about that/those relationship/s, what sorts of things cross your mind?
2. What are your favorite things about this relationship?
3. What do you two work on improving in your relationship now? How?
4. What assets do each of you bring to this relationship?

### E - Resilience
1. Tell me about any issues that other couples in your position might face, but you two are able to take in stride.
2. Which of these challenges have given you special insight, strength or skill?
3. What have you learned about yourself and your world from working together on these things?
4. What are special qualities about yourself that you rely on?
5. What are special qualities about this relationship that you rely on?

### F - Community
1. What people have given you special support, understanding or guidance?
2. What is it that these people have given you that is so exceptional?
3. How did you find them, or how did they find you?
4. What did they respond to in you?

### G - Ending Questions
1. Is there anything else that I should have asked, or that you would like to tell me?
2. Is there anything you would like to ask me about this interview, or anything else?
Data were collected through an interview of 1.5 to 3 hours, with one possible follow-up interview of up to 1 hour if clarifications were needed. A follow-up interview was not needed for any of the participants. A demographic questionnaire was administered and collected prior to the interview, after the collection of signed consent forms. The above interview guide was then used during the semi-structured interview in order to assist with collecting information related to the research questions.

Interviews were recorded using an electronic recording device, from which the audio files were uploaded to a computer and transcribed. Each sound file and its transcript were saved onto one main and one backup form of data storage (a USB memory stick and an external hard drive) before deleting the data off the researcher’s computer and the recording devices. The main electronic files were labeled and kept in a locked file cabinet, in a locked office.

Field notes were made during and after interviews, as well upon review of the digital audio files, to supplement the recordings. Memos, which are defined as “written records of analysis related to the formulation of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 197), were created throughout the process about my thoughts on the emergent theory. All of these paper documents and transcripts were filed and labeled by a pseudonym chosen by the participant during the initial interview. Other names and identifying information were replaced with a representative letter, or disguised with less precise labels.

This precise approach to data collection, focusing on deep and ethical interviewing, produced a substantial body of literature. Transcripts ranged from approximately 20 to 50 double-spaced pages in length. The depth of information yielded by participants’ detailed stories and insightful thoughts, and the quantity of it, yielded a formidable task
for data analysis. However, it also led to strong emergent theories that represented the data and addressed the research questions.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis was carried out according to Charmaz’s (2006) guidelines, with the goal of uncovering emergent theory that provided insight into the research questions. Charmaz (2006) provided the overall framework and philosophy for the data collection and analysis of this project. At times during the coding process, it was necessary to seek more detailed guidance on the development and analysis of codes. For this, the researcher turned to Strauss and Corbin (1990); this text provided detailed definitions and further information useful to later stages of the analysis process. By using Charmaz (2006) for the framework and philosophy of Grounded Theory, and only turning to Strauss and Corbin (1990) for specific information on advanced coding concerns, no contradiction was faced between the authors’ approaches to grounded theory. The analysis of the data utilized constant comparison methods, an ongoing process that occurs concurrently with collection; constant comparison is endorsed by many qualitative research traditions, including Grounded Theory (Ezzy, 2002). This allowed the wording of probing interview questions to be revised in order to better explore the components of the developing theory, which was based in the data (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992, Charmaz, 2006).

Analysis required multiple readings of the transcriptions, supplemented by repeated reviews of the audio files. This combination allowed for a deeper understanding of the context and meaning of the interviews, as well as the research process. Reading the interviews in this way and comparing between interviews is an important part of
analysis in Grounded Theory that occurs before and during the creation of codes (Charmaz, 2006). Coding techniques within Charmaz’s (2006) interpretation of Grounded Theory offer some choices for researchers; however, there is a consistent general structure. Data coding occurs in several stages in order to allow theories to emerge, beginning with initial, open coding. The first stage of coding, according to Charmaz (2006), is when researchers focus most strongly on remaining open to all possible theoretical directions.

Qualitative analysis software was used in order to assist with organization, and to allow easier movement between memos on theory, memos on code reduction, and coding of the data units (Ezzy, 2002). ATLAS.ti was chosen because of its strong reputation, usability, and because it is relatively affordable to students. Furthermore, I was able to secure special training on ATLAS.ti in order to learn its basic functions quickly. Software does not replace the analysis done by the researcher; it is limited to aiding in organization and providing quick retrieval of codes through search functions (Dohan & Sancheq-Jankowski, 1998). Code-and-retriever style software, such as Atlas.ti helps to divide text into segments or chunks, attach codes to the chunks, and find and display all instances of coded chunks (or combinations of the coded chunks) (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 312).

Memos were typed in a special section of the program designed for that purpose, which is an electronic version of traditional pen and paper memo books. Coding utilized colors, and typing of codes occurred around the margins of the text, just as it does when analyzing hard copies of data. These facts support the assertion that “software diminishes
the amount of labour needed to organize and code... data but does not fundamentally change the process of... analysis” (Dohan & Sanchez-Jankowski, 1998, p. 9).

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed promptly after they took place, and supplemented by field notes and memos that documented my thoughts regarding the developing theory. By working in this way, Grounded Theory research approaches each new interview with two goals: remaining open to new information, and inquiring about potential elements of theory that have already begun to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, the interview guide remained essential, but probing questions were updated as called for by constant comparison analysis; this movement between collection and analysis continued throughout the study, as is called for by Grounded Theory. Similarly, the stages of coding were not completed in a strictly linear fashion. Although they are described in ordered stages here, researchers are expected to move between them as dictated by their theoretical sensitivities (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Appendix I, Coding Structure and Definitions, lists the six categories that were derived from the data, as well as the subheadings and dominant codes which were created and their definitions. It is a compilation of tables created during the simultaneous coding and analysis processes of the dissertation. The process of coding is described below.

Appropriate coding begins inductively and starts without a hypothesis, according to Grounded Theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). This stage, referred to as open coding, is a process during which the researcher seeks concepts, themes and meanings within the data, creating a unit of data based around each separate finding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These units are then assigned codes (Charmaz, 2006, Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The creation of these units occurred by reading and considering the data
on several levels, in order to define units based on incidents that held meaning that was both tied to context and self-sufficient.

Quality initial coding should “capture the phenomenon and grab the reader” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Careful initial coding, grounded in the data, also ensures that researchers fulfill two criteria of soundness (discussed more fully later): fit and relevance (Charmaz, 2006). Incident-by-incident coding, rather than word-by-word or line-by-line, was chosen because this method allowed the comparative study of incidents and yielded data units that were intriguing and dynamic to work with. This careful adherence to the interview texts allowed me to “remain open, stay close to the data, keep [my] codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, move quickly through data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49) and complete a thorough phase of open coding. Generally, the use of in vivo codes, which use the exact words and phrases of participants, can assist with this by using the participant’s own words to stay true to their original meanings. Grounded Theorists, however, may only use in vivo codes when they contribute to the budding theory, and are not required to rely on them (Charmaz, 2006).

Open coding resulted in a large number of initial codes, which need to be grouped and reduced over time; this in contrast to beginning with a set number of possible codes or reducing them initially (Pope, Ziebland, Mays, 2000). Thus, the second stage of coding, according to Charmaz (2006), is focused coding. At this stage, the researcher is more selective and is condensing and rewording the initial codes into focused codes that “explain larger segments of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Charmaz (2006) notes that the most common and important codes from the initial stage are kept, and tested for their potential to be useful, complete categories for data. Organizing the initial, open codes
into subgroups required well-defined and exclusive codes. Memoing assisted with this process by offering a format a continuing conversation with myself about my evolving definitions for the newly forming categories.

There are several options for the next level of coding, including axial, descriptive, and theoretical coding. Axial coding is commonly used after making headway with focused coding, and is useful for bringing together the now-fragmented data from initial coding by exploring the relationships among data within the larger categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Descriptive coding focuses on grouping statements by type for purposes other than theory development (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992), and so it was not relevant to this study. Theoretical coding was introduced by Glaser as a way to explore “possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). Theoretical coding was chosen because it maintains a direct relationship to theory building, while avoiding axial coding’s potential for being cumbersome and disruptive to the researcher’s relationship with her data (Charmaz, 2006).

Theoretical codes are integrative; they lend form to the focused codes you have collected. These codes may help you tell an analytic story that has coherence. Hence, these codes not only conceptualize how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63)

I used theoretical coding, aided by memos, to further conceptualize and firm the relationships between the categories already created in focused coding.

Through the processes of initial, incident-by-incident coding focused coding, and theoretical coding, data were analyzed, connections were recognized and a grounded
theory emerged. Constant comparison continued at all levels until the end result was obtained, and I moved in a fluid, non-linear fashion between the stages of coding until I arrived at a theory that came from the data and represented it well. This process yielded a precise and sound theory that was based in the data and buttressed by continuous immersion in the literature. The final theory did not consistently echo or support what had been previously written, since it was not dictated by prior hypotheses. Instead, the incongruence with the literature indicated that the emergent theory was, indeed, a grounded theory developed appropriately from my data.

Soundness

The quality of qualitative research cannot be assessed using the same criteria that quantitative practitioners use because the nature of the work is essentially different. Some have attempted to adapt existing terminology and models for evaluation to qualitative research, while others have sought to create new models for assessing quality (Ezzy, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) presented 26 different approaches, while acknowledging that more exist. Because qualitative research does not use the evaluative criteria traditionally associated with quantitative methodologies (e.g. validity and reliability), Grounded Theorists and other qualitative researchers generally agree that a redefined or otherwise altered set of criteria is necessary (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Crotty (2005), for example, uses the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to address the soundness of studies. Strauss and Corbin (1990) base their criteria on the ability of readers to judge the value of a study for themselves, which requires a great deal of information. They use seven criteria for evaluating soundness related to the use of concepts, variation, process and significance.
Grounded Theory may be judged on whether it is usable, well-fitted to the data and sample population, concise, understandable and able to illuminate the variation within the process of phenomena plotted by the theory (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992). Charmaz (2006), whose work guided the approach to Grounded Theory used in this study, utilizes four criteria for soundness: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. She does not offer concise definitions for these terms, in favor of offering a brief list of evaluative questions for each one.

The concept of credibility “arrive[s] at the crunch question: truth value. Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at?” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278) Credibility requires that the researcher be immersed in adequate data, and that the data support the theory that emerges (Charmaz, 2006). Readers must be able to gather enough information to form their own conclusion, one that agrees with the researcher’s (Charmaz, 2006). Both researchers and participants should find the final product to be credible (Ezzy, 2002). Large amounts of data have been included in the analysis chapter to demonstrate that the information gathered from interviewees was rich, and that it could provide ample support for the presented categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Careful use of Charmaz’s (2006) directions on coding assisted in understanding the necessary steps toward the required immersion and grounding. Careful memoing and documentation of my process assisted in holding me to my data, and allowed my committee to oversee the steps I took during collection and analysis.
Originality, according to Charmaz (2006), requires that researchers produce fresh, new and useful insights from their data. The study must push the field to consider new ideas and concepts, or offer redefinition of established concepts (Charmaz, 2006). The nature of this study ensures that new ground was broken, since very little work has been done on survivors and their new, nonviolent relationships. The use of Saleebey’s strengths-based perspective added a further layer of originality to this process. While these alone do not ensure soundness, they do help to address the issue of originality. Returning to the relevant literature throughout the study also allowed me to strengthen and demonstrate the originality of this work (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2006) notes that resonance is demonstrated by a study that “portrays the fullness of the studied experience” (p. 182), explores the various levels of meanings, and considers links to larger systems. The theory must make sense to participants or to those who have had similar experiences (Charmaz, 2006). It should even offer them original insights (Charmaz, 2006), an evaluative quality that Ezzy (2002) refers to as novelty. The use of memos, field notes, and audio recordings assisted me in capturing the fullness of the interview by supplementing transcripts with observations, and my own experiences of the process. Furthermore, the interview guide included questions that link participants to broader systems. Probing questions were used to explore participant-generated information on these connections. Triangulation, which may be considered a method of enhancing resonance by utilizing multiple levels and forms of data (Charmaz, 2006, Creswell, 2003), was utilized by ensuring a basic understanding of the interviews prior to completing analysis. The interview data were summarized and sent to the participants by email to give them the opportunity to respond and correct any misunderstandings or
errors. Finally, committee members and other professionals, such as administrative staff at a domestic violence shelter, were asked to consider the emergent theory in order to check for resonance with their own academic and life experiences. They did not have access to the transcripts or any identifying information, but rather to the diagram and narrative of the emergent theory.

The last criterion, usefulness, conveys expectations regarding the utility of the generated knowledge to others (Charmaz, 2006). Even if all other aspects of soundness are in place “...we still need to know what the study does for its participants, both researchers and researched—and for its consumers” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 280). In order to be useful, the study should yield new possibilities for research, as well as contributions to the field and society at large (Charmaz, 2006). My background research has shown that there is a need for greater information about the psychosocial and relational implications of IPV on survivors who engage in later, nonviolent relationships. This information can be useful to psychotherapists, outreach workers, survivors and their loved ones, and others who are stakeholders in the area of IPV. It may also yield insights for others interested in strengths-based research and individual or relational resilience. Several participants urged me to publish magazine articles or a book in order to share the results with others, based on a need for information on this topic. Furthermore, a local domestic violence shelter has voiced an interest in utilizing my results in its own case-planning efforts with clients. These potential uses, as well as the strong originality and credibility of the study, guided my work toward the goals of Charmaz’s usefulness.

It is essential to recognize that the study is not intended to yield information that is applicable for an entire population or across time for those interviewed; the
information gathered is specific to the participants and their relationship with the researcher at that point in time (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While qualitative data are not intended to be generalizable, the depth of information and use of established theories and constructs may have yielded results that are transferable within similar populations, as addressed by symbolic interactionism, constructivism and the strengths perspective (Charmaz, 2006). Demographics and other variables have been made explicit in order to allow the audience to judge the degree to which the interpretations can be applied to other samples (Charmaz, 2006), and strong efforts have been made to ensure that the data are presented in adequate depth to allow readers to determine how this information may be of use to them.

**Boundaries of the Study**

All studies have boundaries, regardless of type or methodology. Researcher bias, sampling considerations, and issues of applicability are never completely avoidable, although they must be addressed or minimized when possible. Qualitative research attempts to gather, analyze and present extremely complex data through the lens of the researcher to a wide audience with biases and limitations of their own; this is essential to the ability of qualitative research to explore naturally occurring phenomena and the context in which it occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time, consumers of qualitative research must be aware of both the common boundaries of the research, as well as those specific to a given study.

The participants in this study cannot represent all IPV survivors in nonviolent relationships, nor are they intended to. All research results are based on the context under which data were collected, including my own situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
Recruitment was a painfully difficult process during this study, made moreso because the costs and efforts it entailed were covered by my own limited budget of time and money. Furthermore, I was not seeking a population that commonly identifies itself as survivors, or that can be expected to use a certain set of resources; there is no boutique, school or social club (that I am aware of) dedicated to IPV survivors in later, nonviolent relationships. A sample size of eleven is small by quantitative standards and when compared to interview-based studies done over a multiyear period by groups of funded researchers. However, the amount of data yielded offers a depth and range that does not lend itself to statistical analysis. Consumers of this research cannot take for granted that it applies to their situation, or to that of anyone else; it must be carefully evaluated to see what information, if any, can be transferred in that way. Several participants voiced the belief that their own stories had the potential to inform, assist and influence others.

Administrators at local outreach agencies expressed the same opinion. Furthermore, this study represents an important step in my program of research and makes significant additions to an area lacking in research and strengths-based writing.

In order to strengthen the study during future iterations, it will be necessary to find ways to gain a more diverse sample. Efforts to gain ethnic diversity through UGA’s Office of Intercultural Affairs, Project Safe’s newsletter, and connections working with ethnic minorities were not successful. One participant identified as Black and another as both Native American and Caucasian; the rest identified as variations of Caucasian. The Black participant responded to an ad placed on CraigList.com. Creative solutions and increased connections will be attempted in the future to remedy this limitation. While the study did include one bisexual and one lesbian woman, no openly same-sex attracted men
or transgender people responded. Only two men contacted me; one did not wish to take part in the phone screening. Several other men voiced interest, but they did not live or spend significant time in the Southern United States. I will continue to seek a wider range of ethnicities as well as more male, transgender and same-sex attracted participants.

At the completion of my dissertation, the final text will be shared by email with several participants who requested a copy. I hope to have the opportunity to hear their feedback on the study in order to use it to improve future rounds of research. Their responses, combined with that of other readers and my committee, will help me to continue to both define and expand the boundaries of this study within the limitations and benefits of qualitative methodology.

*Reflexivity Statement*

Over the past several years, women attending therapeutic groups under my facilitation have pulled me aside afterward with an urgent question. Sometimes they gestured to me from the doorway after lingering until the others had left, in order to ask their question privately. Other times they looked for me in the hallways as I walked to file my paperwork, and whispered with me on the stairs. I noticed that student-therapists in my course on abuse in the family lamented that they, too, had this question, but could not find anyone with an answer. I asked friends, cohort members, and fellow professionals about this question and many had wondered the same thing. In whispers, through tears, with frustration or with hope and pride, the question was essentially the same. Is it there anyone (or anyone else) who has made the transition from a violent relationship to a nonviolent one and, if so, what was the process like? These interactions motivated me to search for a way to find answers through my dissertation.
In 1999, I began working with abused women, quite unintentionally, by taking an undergraduate internship as an assistant to a pregnancy options counselor at a women’s reproductive health clinic; this clinic, in part due to its location on Syracuse’s public bus line, served many low- and no-income women. During this time I also experienced a long-term relationship with issues related to power and control. When I graduated in 2000, I found my way into a volunteer position at a domestic violence multi-service center in Michigan where I received my first official training in working with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the form of a forty-hour program. I had the busy overnight shift, and also covered the hot, stressful, and drunken summer holidays.

On my last night I listened quietly to a mother no older than myself, her young children sleeping in front of a large fan on the living room couch, while we moved her refrigerator in front of the holes in the apartment wall that the father of her children had made with her head just hours before. One of my trainers had said that she considered herself “an undercover warrior against the patriarchy,” and I was not ready to walk away from that effort. I continued to choose positions that allowed me to work with struggling families, many of whom experienced IPV. During my Masters degree, I specialized in offering therapy to survivors and their partners. As every therapist does, whether they know it or not, I saw many couples in which various forms of abuse were regular occurrences. During my Ph.D. studies I have brought my dedication and training to therapy groups offered through, and at, the local battered women’s shelter.

Throughout my life I have experienced the undue privilege of being a well-educated, able-bodied, white woman from a relatively safe, rural background. Although my family experienced poverty while I was young, this was during the course of their
education and so it was part of a process of upward mobility. As an only child whose biological parents are still happily married, I was further privileged. Of course, as a member of a dominant culture I was not aware of my privileged status for quite some time, and cannot be as aware of it as those without such privilege. This status was increased when I partnered with a well-educated white male, although his queer identity and feminist affiliation are relevant. To a limited extent, I have experienced undue oppression as a queer woman who is not consistently welcomed by the lesbian or heterosexual communities. During periods of my adult life I have lived in condemnable apartments in highly disreputable urban areas because I could not afford to live elsewhere. At these times, I also experienced the struggles of surviving through the welfare system and being without health insurance. However, like my parents, this was a step in the process of upward mobility.

My background and experiences created biases, openness, awareness and increased theoretical sensitivity within this research. While I have increased sensitivity to various aspects of power, and experience with a range of cultures and relation types, I also view interactions from a feminist framework that focuses on power, oppression, and the value of both lived experiences and community. To lack this bias would be to replace it with another. My privilege-born shortcomings are of greater concern. The political nature of all research is acknowledged as unavoidable, and this study is not an exception.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Data for this qualitative study were collected through face-to-face interviews of approximately an hour and a half to nearly three hours in length. Participants were invited to choose the location of the interview, and sites ranged from private homes and offices to outdoor tables at busy coffee shops. Recruiting began in September, 2008, and the eleven interviews took place from November, 2008 through January, 2009. Transcripts of the analysis were analyzed using Grounded Theory techniques, culminating in an emergent, process-focused model for the participant’s transition from a violent relationship to a new, nonviolent one.

This chapter will begin with compiled demographics and then will present an analysis of the data. Throughout, each participant will be referred to by a pseudonym of her or his choosing; some participants picked a new name, while others chose a pair of letters. Identifying information has been disguised or removed, in order to protect the identities of participants. After considering the demographics of the interviewees, the findings will be presented by addressing each of the three research questions through direct quotes from the interviews. Finally, a brief overview of the emergent theory and the main theoretical codes of which it is composed will be presented.
The Participants

At the beginning of the interview participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) and create a pseudonym. Eleven interviewees participated in this study, including ten females and one male. Ages in the sample ranged from twenty-three through fifty-six. Nine participants self-identified as heterosexual, one as bisexual, and one as homosexual. One participant stated that she was both White and Native American; one participant identified herself as Black and the remaining nine self identified as White or Caucasian. All of the members of this sample had enrolled in education beyond the high school level: five had enrolled in some college course work; three attended a technical or trade school; one had an undergraduate degree, and three carried a graduate degree. In response to a request for the duration of their current, nonviolent relationship, participants reported answers ranging from one through fifteen years. This information is presented in table format in Appendix A.

Additional information was collected during the demographic survey but was omitted from the demographics table to preserve the confidentiality of participants. Only four participants had children, including step-children, and none had more than three. Three participants currently have children in their care. Most of the participants were either dating monogamously (4) or living with (4) their current partner. These totals include one participant who is both living with and engaged to her partner; she was the only interviewee who was engaged. Three identified as married, or in a similarly committed relationship.

Participants were also asked about past abuse other than IPV, rape and the nature and duration of the previous violent relationship. Four noted that they had been
emotionally or physically abused as a child. Two of these participants made special notes for inclusion in the study; one was “molested but not traumatized” and the other was “molested by [family member], no penetration.” One participant had been raped or experienced forced sex as an adult from someone with whom they were not in an intimate relationship.

The duration of the previous relationship spanned from just under a year to nearly three decades. Most participants listed the past, violent relationship as monogamous dating (4) or married or similarly committed (4). This includes one person who marked both monogamous dating and open dating; this was the only person who identified their relationship as open dating. One person lived with the violent partner, and one was engaged to that person. No interviewees had experienced more than one violent intimate relationship during their lifetime.

Participants were offered the opportunity to read a brief summary of their interview and offer their feedback and corrections. These summaries served to ensure that I understood the timeline of major events in the participant's story of transition, the types of violence encountered, and the some general information about the current relationship. Furthermore, these summaries contained some information regarding the interview environment and the current relationship. They are not part of the analysis or presentation of the data, but may be reviewed in Appendix H. Some participants reported small additions and these were corrected before inclusion. Their exact words, quoted from their interviews, are used within these biographies. Some details have been disguised in order to preserve their confidentiality.
Building the Emergent Theory

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), who are now in later non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship. In order to do this, the interview data from the above participants was transcribed and analyzed using Grounded Theory. These units of data were given codes designed to summarize that unit’s meaning, as relevant to the research questions. It is common to discover that some codes may be combined while others must be split apart during the analysis process.

Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that Grounded Theorists apply a basic linear model for the analysis of their codes and categories, in order to enhance systemic thinking. This causal model, called The Paradigm Model, allows for more complex analysis and theoretical development. They warn “Unless you make use of this model, your grounded theory analyses will lack density and precision” (p. 99). Below, table 4.1, The Paradigm Model, shows this model.

Table 4.1. The Paradigm Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Paradigm Model</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Causal Conditions → (B) Phenomena → (C) Content →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Intervening Conditions → (E) Action/Interaction Strategies → (F) Consequences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the codes were condensed and organized through the creation of more structured definitions and then grouped into larger, more general, categories. These categories represented different aspects of the basic process in which participants engaged during the transition from violent to nonviolent relationships. Table 4.2, Analysis Categories (below), lists the six components of The Paradigm Model, the associated category from the analysis of the data, and then a sample of illustrative codes. Due to the large number of codes, some of which were concentric, only the most clearly illustrative codes are included below. Other codes were included in or directional derivatives of the ones listed below.

Table 4.2. Analysis Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm Model</th>
<th>Analysis Category</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Causal Conditions</td>
<td>Increases in risks and strengths</td>
<td>Key changes in abuse, Changes in context, Awareness and motivators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Phenomenon</td>
<td>Transition from violent to nonviolent relationships</td>
<td>Differentiation and comparison, Shifting roles, Later smoothness and struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Context</td>
<td>Microsystemic conditions</td>
<td>Abuser and Abuser-Couple, Partner and Survivor-Couple, Important others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Intervening Conditions</td>
<td>Macrosystemic conditions</td>
<td>Partners’ histories, Culture and comparisons, External negative events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F) Consequences</td>
<td>Expressions of individual and survivor-couple resilience</td>
<td>Makes you stronger, Present and future, Partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While The Paradigm Model can yield more complex, systemic thought, it is also necessary to consider the process involved.

Process is a way of giving life to data by taking snapshots of action/interaction and linking them to form a sequence or series… Unless the analyst is made keenly aware of the need to identify process, to build it into analysis, it is often omitted or done in a very narrow and limited fashion. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 144)

The Process Analysis Diagram (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) offers an illustration of this concept. Researchers are encouraged to utilize it in order to enhance their focus on the element of process in their data and analysis. Figure 4.1, below, shows the Process Analysis Diagram.

![Figure 4.1. Process Analysis Diagram](image)

Figure 4.1. Process Analysis Diagram
After the coding process was complete and larger categories were developed, the resulting categories were then compared to The Paradigm Model and the Process Analysis Diagram. As illustrated in the coding table, six categories readily formed from the existing analysis, corresponding with The Paradigm Model. These categories were: Increases in Risks and Strengths; Microsystemic Conditions; Macrosystemic Conditions; Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships; Agency in Preparation, Termination, and Single-hood; and Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. Upon further analysis it was apparent that these six categories could also be applied to the Process Analysis Diagram to illuminate the element of process revealed from the data. The following figure illustrates the application of the analysis to the Process Analysis Diagram, forming the emergent theory for this study.

**Figure 4.2.** Process Theory for Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship
As seen in the above Figure 4.2, Process Theory for Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship, all six of the analysis categories are depicted nonlinearly. At the same time, the linear nature of the passage of time is accounted for by the arrow labeled Chronology at the top of the figure. The phenomenon at the heart of this study, the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships appears at the far left and is connected by Change created by Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood to the category which represents the experiences of the participants at the time of the interview: Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. During Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood, three categories of factors bore significant impact: Increases in Risks and Strengths; Microsystemic Conditions, and Macrosystemic Conditions. Increases in Risks and Strengths held the unique dual role as both impacting the Change aspect of the process and also creating the catalyst that initiated the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships.

In the Process Theory for Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship diagram, a more complex, process-oriented model emerges from the data. Every participant’s experience was unique, but throughout analysis it became clear that certain themes and processes were reflected across interviews. Over time the transition between relationships leads, through a series of changes, to expressions of individual and relational resilience. The combination of systemic conditions and increases in opportunities, motivation, strengths and other resources influences demonstrations of the survivors’ agency in preparing for and carrying out the transition process. The purpose of this study dictated that all of the participants had experienced a transition from a violent
relationship to a current nonviolent relationship. No hypotheses were made about this transition, allowing Ground Theory analysis to develop an emergent theory.

The analysis of the data provides a wealth of rich illustrations for each aspect of this model. In order to demonstrate this emergent theory, it is necessary to return to the original data and codes. The following sections of this chapter will illuminate the six categories by exploring the sub-categories in the participants’ own words. Before considering the components of the emergent theory, the analysis will be applied to the three research questions guiding this study.

*Application to the Research Questions*

The three research questions for this study served to guide the exploration of the study’s phenomenon of interest, as well as the creation of the interview guide. As a result, the data from this study and the emergent theory address these research questions. Before the categories yielded from the analysis are described in greater detail, this section will explore the application of the data and theory to the research questions.

In order to assure that the research questions were addressed, the interview questions were written to yield information pertaining to at least one question each, or to establish the context of the process under exploration. Probing questions were used during the interviews to further encourage participants to include data that would address the research questions. Since the interview guide utilized open-ended questions, it was correctly predicted that some of the interview questions would yield information regarding two or three research questions. Table 4.3, Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Guide Questions (below), lists the research questions along with the corresponding interview guide questions.
### Table 4.3. Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Guide Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Guide Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.) What do IPV Survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths? | C - **Nonviolent Relationship**  
2. How did you come to realize that this is a nonviolent relationship?  
3. How would you describe this relationship?  
4. How do you talk to others about this relationship?  
6. What kinds of conversations do the two of you have about that/those prior relationship/s?  
7. How do others talk about your current relationship?  
D - **Strengths**  
1. When you’re going about your day and you just sort of start thinking about that/those relationship/s, what sorts of things cross your mind?  
2. What are your favorite things about this relationship?  
3. What do you two work on improving in your relationship now? How?  
4. What assets do each of you bring to this relationship?  
E - **Resilience**  
3. What have you learned about yourself and your world from working together on these things?  
5. What are special qualities about this relationship that you rely on? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Interview Guide Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A - Prior Relationship &amp; Transition Out</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What do you tell others about the violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What do you tell others about your transition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B - Between Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Was there any time when you were single between your violent and nonviolent relationships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Please tell me about what it was like to be out of the violent relationship/s and single.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C - Nonviolent Relationship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How would you describe this relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. How do you talk to others about this relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. What kinds of conversations do the two of you have about that/those prior relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. How do others talk about your current relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>D - Strengths</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What assets do each of you bring to this relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>E - Resilience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Which of these challenges have given you special insight, strength or skill?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What are special qualities about yourself that you rely on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>F - Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. What people have given you special support, understanding or guidance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What is it that these people have given you that is so exceptional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How did you find them, or how did they find you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What did they respond to in you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>Corresponding Interview Guide Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationship? | A - Prior Relationship & Transition Out
6. For many people it takes some time to recover from that kind of relationship, especially to the point of having new, nonviolent relationships. Could you tell me about what it was like for you?
7. How were you able to transition into a non-violent relationship, considering everything that happened?
8. What do you tell others about the violent relationship/s?
9. What do you tell others about your transition?

C - Nonviolent Relationship
5. Tell me about any ways the things from the violent relationship/s have popped up in this relationship, good or bad.
   1. How do you respond to them?

D - Strengths
4. What assets do each of you bring to this relationship?

E - Resilience
1. Tell me about any issues that other couples in your position might face, but you two are able to take in stride.

The analysis of the interview data yielded the six categories that were introduced in the previous section and will be explored in greater detail in the following section. The categories and resulting model address the process of transition from the violent to nonviolent relationship. This process can be used to address the purpose of the study, which was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous IPV, who are now in later non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship. After the analysis of the data was complete, the categories were then applied to the research questions.
Answers to the research questions spanned the model that was developed, and so information on each question frequently spanned categories. The categories Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience and Transition From Violent to Nonviolent Relationships spanned all three questions. The following Table, 4.4 Research Questions and Associated Analysis Categories and Sub-Categories, links the research questions to the categories that contained relevant information to each.

**Table 4.4.** Research Questions and Associated Analysis Categories and Sub-Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Associated Analysis Categories and Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.) What do IPV Survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths? | □ Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience  
   o Makes you stronger  
   o Present and future  
   o Partners  
   □ Transition From Violent to Nonviolent Relationships  
   o Differentiation and comparison  
   o Later smoothness and struggles  
   o Shifting roles  
   · Microsystemic Conditions  
   o Partner and survivor-couple  
   o Important others  
   · Macrosystemic Conditions  
   o Partners’ histories |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Associated Analysis Categories and Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their</td>
<td>Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships?</td>
<td>o Makes you stronger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Present and future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Shifts in communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Exceptional acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Single-hood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition From Violent to Nonviolent Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Differentiation and comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Later smoothness and struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Shifting roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increases in Risks and Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Key changes in abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Changes in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Awareness and motivators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Microsystemic Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Abuser and abuser-couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Partner and survivor-couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Important others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macrosystic Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Partners’ histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Culture and comparisons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o External negative events</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The data gathered and analyzed during this study yielded a wealth of information, much of which was applicable to the research questions. The analysis of these data led to the creation of the six categories of the emergent theory. The categorized data were then probed for information in response to the three research questions. All three research questions were addressed by the data, and all of the categories contributed to answering at least one research question. The following detailed descriptions and examples of the six categories can serve to further illustrate the ways in which the research questions were addressed by the data.

**Increases in Risks and Strengths**

The Increases in Risks and Strengths category holds a dynamic position in this grounded theory. This category contains phenomena that precede and inspire the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships then continue to impact the Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood; these phenomena serve as both catalysts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Associated Analysis Categories and Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationship? | - Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience  
  o Makes you stronger  
  o Present and future  
  o Partners  
  - Transition From Violent to Nonviolent Relationships  
  o Differentiation and comparison  
  o Later smoothness and struggles  
  o Shifting roles |
and supports. The three sub-categories in this section are Key Changes, Changes in Context, and Awareness and motivators. In this category, participants share stories of motivating events, increases in awareness, larger-level changes that impacted the relationship or their position in it, and changes in the nature or level of abuse. These worked together to stimulate the transition and continued to support the process over time.

*Key Changes*

Participants in this study were often able to point to memorable, key changes in the cycle of abuse that they experienced. Sometimes these changes sparked a private decision to develop ways to transition out of violence over the coming years. Other times the change in violence quickly led to the termination of the relationship. Either way, participants shared that these key changes were important to their experiences.

Several interviewees noted that an increase in violence led them to a decision that initiated a long-term process of ending the relationship. In these situations, the change did not lead to immediate termination of the relationship. Ann remembered her thoughts during a sexual assault by her ex-partner. Although she wasn’t sure what to do, it marked a point in the relationship when she knew that things were not right and she considered the consequences of leaving.

*Ann: If there was a moment that stood out for me...* I was raped one night by him and feeling so powerless and... hopeless because, um I, I didn’t have any education, I couldn’t, you know in my mind I couldn’t take care of my children, um, God would hate me, I would let my parents down, I mean there were just, you
know, all these reasons, um knowing somewhere deep inside that I didn’t deserve
to be treated that way, but not knowing what to do about it.

Ann recalled feeling “powerless” and “hopeless” about her ability to leave the
relationship because of her lack of resources, religious boundaries, and family
relationships. At the same time, this occurrence marked a time during which she
considered leaving as a desirable goal. Earlier in Ann’s violent relationship, she had felt
that it was the task of a woman to make the relationship work, regardless of how the male
partner behaved. This story illustrates a Key Change, stemming from the intensity of this
violent act. At this time, she knew she “didn’t deserve to be treated that way.”

For Ginger, the motivating change in violence happened when her former partner
impregnated another woman, an act of “intense... emotional abuse.” This Key Change in
the intensity of the violence in her relationship moved Ginger to tell her others in her life
about her relationship concerns for the first time.

Ginger: When he cheated on me and he got the girl pregnant, I had had enough. I
was so emotionally broken, I had to tell my family. Um, I, I didn’t know what to
do. I had to call and confess to my bosses, and I was just so broken.

A few years later her family was aware and there to support her when she had the
opportunity to move away and end the relationship. This key change in the level and type
of violence in the former relationship led to a change in Ginger’s behavior, paving the
way for her process of transition out of the relationship.

Participants also shared stories of changes in the violence that led to an immediate
end to the relationship. Some had been working toward ending relationship for some
time, others only realized it was time to leave when the changed occurred and got out
soon after. For Alexis, it was the first act of physical violence that signaled a prompt end for her relationship.

_Alexis: It was an abusive relationship on several levels, um emotionally and um mentally and um at the very end he became physically abusive and that’s when I finally just ended it... That was the first time that anyone had been physically abusive to me... and even emotionally and verbally abusive as well, you know and but when the physical part happened, I, I finally was smart enough to put an end to it and not tolerate him anymore, but that [physically violent incident] was unfortunately a year later._

Alexis moved quickly to leave the relationship when it escalated from verbal and emotional to physical violence. This key change signaled the beginning of a prompt transition out of the relationship, after nearly a year of attempting to manage the non-physical forms of violence.

A Key Change can signal the start of the transition process, and it can also support a transition that is already in process. For Marta, a sudden escalation further supported her efforts to end the relationship. Marta recalled an incident of physical violence that began after she told her violent former partner to leave.

_Marta: I came back and said... “I want you out. I’m so clear about this.” ...and he actually would not [leave]... and uh he backhanded me and he hit me so hard... I was kind of in shock... Because there had never been anything [physically violence before]... I landed on the floor and I said, “That was a really big mistake” ...and I went downstairs and I went to pick up the phone and he yanked the phone out of the wall and at that point... I was realizing wow this is
a really, this is really serious... I finished pulling on my coat and he grabbed me from behind and... he did not realize it, but he was cutting off my air supply...

When he realized and he let go and he said, “You’re not leaving, I’ll leave,” and I said, “Alright.”

Marta had decided to terminate the violent relationship before the first episode of physical violence. This story shares her final attempt (of several) to ask him to leave. However, when the key change occurred and the violence escalated to battering, it further supported her decision to leave, instead of motivating her to try to manage the violence by agreeing to stay together. Ultimately, he offered to leave the house and she did not continue her romantic relationship with him.

When Layla’s former boyfriend increased his emotional and verbal abuse to her “breaking point,” she quickly ended the relationship. The insults escalated until she felt that she could no longer tolerate them, and so she developed a response that simultaneously took back “control” and terminated their romantic relationship.

Layla: It took me the better part of three years to be able to walk away from him and not feel resentment or... hurt feelings or questioning whether I made the right decision, questioning whether things would ever... be different in the future, but I had to let myself get to a certain... breaking point where I was in control and I took the control away from him... and the final time [that he was emotionally abusive] I got to my breaking point and at that moment I realized I have to do it on my terms and not his and once I did it, once I did things on my terms, I was completely okay with it.
For Layla, once the Key Change occurred, she could no longer tolerate his verbal and emotional attacks. During a prolonged period of intense verbal abuse, the intensity of violence created a Key Change. She informed him of the end of the relationship using carefully chosen words that reclaimed her sense of “control” and put the termination on her “terms.”

Increases in Risks and Strengths occurred in every interview, often multiple times, usually taking the form of a distinct increase or shift in the ongoing violence. Some participants experienced the Key Change and were able to leave immediately. Others utilized the change as a catalyst to begin a long process of developing the opportunity to get out of the relationship. Nearly every participant shared stories of Key Changes, often combined with the other sub-categories within Increases in Risks and Strengths. The examples from these five interviews offer illustrations of the role of Key Changes in both initiating and supporting transitions.

Changes in Context

Changes in Context occurred when the environment or conditions surrounding the interviewee shifted, laying the groundwork for change. These situations were based on the context of the participant that triggered an action that led to, or supported, their transition. Sometimes these Changes in Context followed an increase in violence, but it was the change in context that led to the beginning of transition, or further supported it.

When ST’s son’s teacher came to her and told ST that they would have to file a report with child protective services unless ST and her son moved away from his father, ST faced an unexpected change in context. She had stayed with her violent partner for fear of losing her son, but the situation changed due to the threat of being reported to
child protective services. Because of this Change in Context, she decided that she had to risk leaving for the highest chance of keeping him in her care.

ST: The turning point was... Monday morning. We went to school... and the director comes up to me, she goes, “Your son just told the whole class that his dad had a knife to his mom’s throat.... he’s going to kill, he’s going to slice her neck.... You know we’ve got to do something.” So she legally, she had to report it. So she said, “Either you need to leave today or I have to report... that he said that.” So we... planned on leaving that night.

ST survived a potentially lethal attack that night as she and her son struggled to leave. It was not the first time that ST’s life was at risk at the hands of her violent former partner. This time, however, the Change in Context motivated her to cease trying to manage the violence by staying. Instead, she achieved her new goal of leaving permanently by calling for assistance from a new friend that eventually became her loving current partner and co-parent.

Savanah’s context changed dramatically when her ex-partner moved out of town and she moved into a shared apartment with a housemate who responded to her distress with care and respect. Her context continued to change as she and her housemate developed a romantic interest for each other and both her housemate and her ex-partner urged her to make a choice. She utilized this shift in situation to break up with her ex-partner and commit to a loving relationship with her housemate.

Savanah: I told him, “Yeah, I met this guy, we’re just hanging out, being, you know, friends.” and um, so it was like we met on a Saturday and so it was the next week, it was Sunday in my apartment [my ex-partner] wouldn’t stop calling, just
calling constantly, constantly, and so finally [my current partner said]... “I’ve been with people before that wouldn’t leave their other one, so it’s just, you’ve got to make a choice.”

The loving support and mutual attraction that she experienced with her housemate created an important Change in Context for Savanah. She called her ex-partner and terminated their relationship permanently, solidifying her developing romance with her housemate. Like ST and the man who supported her while she ended her violent relationship, Savanah and her new partner became a long-term, nonviolent and happily committed couple.

Napoleon did not experience a Change in Context with the help of a supportive friend; he found it in jail. As part of a particularly violent attack that left him bloodied and with permanent scars, Napoleon’s former partner called the police and had him arrested for domestic violence. It was during his time in jail that he decided that he wanted to be single again. The Change in Context from a chaotic and dangerous relationship to a quiet cell offered him new opportunities to consider his situation and create a plan to end the relationship when he was released. It also emphasized the harmful state of his violent relationship.

*Napoleon: I was grateful to be alone, flat out. I didn’t need my mom, my dad, my sister, my brothers. I just wanted to be alone and that, and I was given the opportunity by the Lord. He just snatched me up and put me behind bars and said it’s going to be okay.*

Napoleon was able to consider his resources during that time. With the help of a trusted male friend, he acted to terminate the relationship soon after he was freed. His Change of
Context inspired him to transition out of the relationship and allowed him to create a plan that would support the process.

Napoleon was not the only one who discussed the value of a change in location, although he was the only participant to speak positively about being arrested. For Sara, the end of her “volatile” relationship coincided with a major relocation, change of employment, and the pursuit of new social circles. Returning to her hometown allowed her to meet her current partner and make supportive new friends, further supporting her transition.

*Sara:* I was kind of in a real great… state of mind because I had left [my old city]… I’d been living in [that city] for [many] years, so it was a big deal. I was coming home, broke up with [my ex-partner], I mean it was a big, you know. “I’m breaking up with you and I’m moving back home.” ...So, it was a very cathartic time when I was coming back here.

Sara’s former partner moved out after Sara told the ex-partner about the upcoming move, signaling the end of their intimate relationship. This Change in Context offered Sara a new sense of hope on many levels. It was also an exciting opportunity to develop a nonviolent relationship with a new partner.

Many interviewees experienced Changes in Context during their experiences. The examples from these four interviewees offer insight into the role of these changes for participants. Some greeted the change with happiness; for others, it was a frightening shift in their lives. Regardless, these events played an important role in initiating and supporting their transitions.
Awareness and Motivators

Some participants noted specific incidents in which they experienced an increased level of awareness about themselves or their situation in the violent relationship. This new realization triggered and supported the process of transition. It is possible that other interviewees also had these experiences but did not include it in their stories.

MS knew that her relationship was violent, but she vividly remembers the moment that she became aware of the severity of the violence, and the importance of finding a way out. It was the words of MS’s young child that motivated the process of transition for MS years before her efforts to leave came to fruition.

MS: She was kind of my saving grace because we were sitting in the living room one day and there were a few toys around the living room and she says, “Mama, let’s hurry up and clean this up before daddy gets home so he doesn’t get mad.” ... She was four... To know that her father was going to walk through the door and be angry because there were, there wasn’t more than four or five toys on the floor... So it was at that point that I was like okay, you know, something’s gotta give. I’ve got to get out of this situation.

MS’s daughter made MS aware of severity of the violence, a situation that the young child was already trying to manage. It took several years for MS to prepare to terminate the relationship, but she credited this new awareness for beginning the process.

Sasha gained a new awareness when she intercepted a message from her former partner’s secret girlfriend. A text message from his other girlfriend made Sasha aware that her ex-partner was not only controlling her, but also cheating on her. For Sasha, this new awareness about the humiliating nature of the violent relationship crossed an
important boundary. This new information motivated her to demand fidelity, and to leave when he declined to end the affair.

*Sasha: One day he um, his phone rang and I thought it was his mother, but it was a text message and it said that… “I got something from Victoria’s Secret for us.”… So apparently he was dating another girl for the past [few] years also, along with me… Honestly it took um me finding out he was with somebody else… I told him… to end it and he said he didn’t want to… so, you know, that was probably the end.*

Sasha used this new information to confront her ex-partner and assert her expectations for monogamy. When she became aware that he would not be faithful, even when confronted, she quickly terminated the relationship.

For these two participants, and others, Awareness and Motivators played an important part in their experiences. A realization, triggered by new information, motivated them to create an end to their relationships. The examples above provide insight into this situation that some participants shared during their interviews.

Key Changes took the form of increases in violence. Changes in Context occurred when participants found their physical or operational conditions were no longer the same. Awareness and Motivators happened when participants came to a new realization about the violent relationship and gained the motivation to create change in their lives. These three sub-categories of Increases in Risks and Strengths were illustrated multiple times in every interview, spanning the initiation and length of the transition between relationships. They combined with Microsystemic Conditions and
Macrosystemic Conditions to provide a complex combination of conditions that prepared the participants for Agency in Preparations, Termination, and Single-hood.

*Microsystemic Conditions*

The Microsystemic Conditions category joins Increase in Risk and Strengths and Macrosystemic Conditions in creating changing conditions that influence the transition across time. Microsystemic Conditions compose the specific properties and conditions that co-create the context for actions that interviewees took during the process of transition. The data in this category are focused on the role of individuals, organizations and other entities that had a direct influence on the participants’ transitions through their interactions with interviewees, for better or worse. All of the participants in this study offered a wealth of information in this category. Three sub-categories are contained in this category: Abuser and Abuser-Couple; Partner and Survivor-Couple; and Important Others.

*Abuser and Abuser-couple*

Interactions with the abuser and the context of living life within a violent relationship comprise the Abuser and Abuser-Couple sub-category. These parts of their stories set an essential context from which each participant rose to end the IPV in their lives and created better lives for themselves and with their current partners. Each participant shared many negative memories of time spent with their ex-partners, but some also noted that there were positive times and aspects to the relationship. Both the negative and positive facets of the relationship combined to encourage the process of change that formed the period of transition from the violent to the nonviolent relationship for participants.
Many participants felt that the beginning of the violent relationship was less than ideal. They were not able to begin the relationship with the appropriate resources to advocate and care for themselves or enough knowledge about the former partner. The reasons that interviewees cited varied and included youth, relationships that became intense quickly, cultural expectations, and delayed impact of addictions.

Alexis enjoys dating and prefers being in a relationship over being single. When she met her ex-partner, their relationship quickly became intense. She found herself committed before she knew about parts of his background of which she would have otherwise been wary.

Alexis: I’ve been in many relationships in my life... I would get bored easily with people and so I... quickly and easily move on to the next person. [Laughter] When I started dating, um, this guy... he was ten years older than me. He had been in the [armed forces] for [many] years, um been divorced twice and had two kids and all-around bad person for me. Not the right person at all, but um we met at work and I kind of just started dating him... [I] went on several dates with him before I found all of that out, so I was kind of already in before I, I realized who he was and what he was.

The background of her former partner, and the quick beginning of their relationship, formed a context that impacted her position within the relationship. This is one of many illustrations that Alexis gave of the context of the violent relationship that she transitioned out of.

Ann grew up in a religious community with strict expectations for young women, and taking time for dating was discouraged in favor of a prompt marriage. This context
created an environment where it was her responsibility to please and adapt to her husband, whether or not he was violent. In that atmosphere, relationships were not evaluated based on fairness or nonviolence and so she readily dedicated herself to sustaining the relationship. Ann offered her reflections on dating and getting married.

*Ann:* Yeah, it wasn’t about having fun... [or] building friendships and that kind of thing. It was... immediately that, uh, there was always that underlying focus of marriage... We dated for, or were engaged, for about six months and got married... and right from the beginning it didn’t feel good, but I didn’t know that it was supposed to feel any other way... By feeling, I mean as far... as even the basic partnership... there just wasn’t that. I didn’t feel like I had an equal voice in the partnership. I felt like... [I could have] carefully stated opinions, but if they didn’t want to be taken into consideration then it was my duty, my place in life, to be quiet and make whatever decision was made to work.

The combination of Ann and her former partner’s upbringing and religious context contributed greatly to the formation of their violent relationship through the associated gendered family roles and traditions. This context was permissive of relationships that lacked a sense of “partnership” and forbid efforts by female partners to directly influence the relationship with their “stated opinions.” This was essential groundwork for the abuse she experienced, and helped to encourage the violent aspects of their relationship. Ann’s transition process took place within this context.

Some interviewees discussed the importance of their former partners’ substance addictions. Marta and ST were both unaware of the nature of their ex-partners’ substance
use when the relationship started, and were already invested in the relationship by the
time it escalated.

Marta: Um, uh, he could not, he was horribly chemically addicted and I really
was not aware of how extreme the addiction was. He has a very wired
personality, so um and I thought that he was addicted to pot and the truth is he
was addicted to coke.

ST: He had a drinking problem and I noticed it um, I think it was there all along,
but I didn’t notice it until he started getting violent… After that then it was just, it
was like every week he’d come home, when he did come home he was drunk, and
he would just take it out on me… He was a violent drunk, not a nice drunk.

Marta and ST gave many examples of how a lack of knowledge about the partner,
combined with history of substance addictions, offered a defining context for abuse.
Every abusive relationship was different and impacted the transition process differently in
this study.

Once in the relationship, participants faced a variety of communication
difficulties. All of the interviewees highlighted distressing communication patterns as
well as specific examples of memorable conversations and verbal fights. These incidents
left them feeling “embarrassed,” “helpless,” “shocked,” frightened, and disempowered.
These negative communication patterns created an essential context of verbal violence.

Layla: I think my first realization was one of our first fights where he accused me
of not listening, even though I heard every word that he said, but he still accused
me of not listening and not taking what he said seriously and not, not appreciating
his, his words and accused me of not being fair to him and the way that he talked
to me during the course of that conversation was demeaning and embarrassing and I felt like I was being chastised like a little kid by a parent.

Layla offers an example from her first fight with her ex-partner that demonstrated the pattern of continuing verbal and emotional violence that defined her intimate relationship with him. It was often difficult for them to talk without “fights” like this occurring. This created an important context of violence out of which she had to transition.

Sara also talked about one of the first fights that she had with her female ex-partner, which started after she noticed that Sara had not made their bed. Like Layla, Sara said that this was an accurate representation of the violent communication patterns in the relationship.

Sara: I mean, she just started screaming, yelling and then saying... “You may live this way, but I don’t live this way!” and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and so I left... it was so intense and, um, there was a little café... next door and I just went there and I sat there... in shock because it was so extreme for what it was and she came down and apologized and everything and when I look back on it, um it really was pretty significant... knew it was going to be uh kind of rough and I kind of liked that, that kind of energy sometimes... I like the crazy, especially at that point in my life, I liked a lot of craziness and chaos... and... experiencing life the way it comes... but I really was shocked by that... We just continued from there, but that was really the first, real kind of uh fight we had that... dictated... where her margins are [Laughter], you know. She’s going to flip.

The specific negative and violent forms of communication, illustrated by these quotes from Layla and Sara, formed the basis for the violence in the relationship that they later
terminated. It is important to recognize the influence of these negative abusive communication patterns on the context of the relationships that interviewees eventually left, and on their process of transition.

A few of the participants stressed that the violent relationship wasn’t always bad. They included some examples of positive communication together. Layla had a great deal of “respect” for her ex-partner and valued their conversations when the relationship was more pleasant.

*Layla: It was intense because the anger that we both had in dealing with all the negative stuff, all the arguments and the problems that we had, um I always hung up the phone either crying or I was crying or I was going to cry later. It always ended in me being upset and him feeling like the big man because he made the girl cry. It was also intense in that when I was with him and we spent quality time together the whole world could have been falling to shit. We could have had Armageddon about to happen and we were so happy with each other’s company that it didn’t matter. We were just happy to sit and stare at each other and talk to each other and just generally be with each other.*

It is possible, perhaps even likely, that many participants shared similarly positive times with their partners. This was not only essential to the context of the violent relationship, but also to forming the context from which each participant began their transition. While each participant experienced a unique set of positive and negative factors in their abusive relationship, each of them was heavily impacted by the microcontextual factors of those relationships.
Ginger also talked about positive elements within her relationship with her ex-partner. She remembered a period of time at the end of their relationship that exemplified its enjoyable aspects.

\textit{Ginger: He was very, just comforting and I guess normal in and I mean, it was, it was a familiarity thing, you know, just to have something to come home to, something you know, something you love, somebody that loves the same things that you do, who will feed my cats for me.}

All of the interviews contained examples of strained, distressing and abusive communication. Those that talked about the beginning of the violent relationship discussed entering it unaware of what was to come. Some participants also noted that there were things about their ex-partners that were positive and parts of the relationship that were good. These factors combined to form the relationship context that necessitated the transition out of the violence. Initial interactions with participants’ current partners also influenced the transition toward the beginning of the new relationship. The Partner and Survivor-Couple sub-category contained illustrations of how the new partner and relationship influenced the latter periods of transition.

\textit{Partner and Survivor-couple}

Continued positive communication within a healthy, romantic context supported the latter stages of the transition: the establishment and maintenance of the nonviolent relationship. All of the interviewees shared their stories of meeting and creating a relationship with their current partners. They also spoke extensively about the desirable communication patterns and positive context of their new relationships. Their experiences with developing relationships and establishing positive communication styles
with these nonviolent partners played an important role in their stories. For some of them, it provided a supportive context in which to end the prior relationship. For others it offered a desirable opportunity to transition from single-hood (sometimes including casual dating) into a new, committed relationship.

Many of the participants expressed that they “jumped into” the new relationship, quickly investing their trust and commitment, often guided by wisdom gained from the violent relationship. Some had known the new partner as an old friend, others had recently met. These interviewees said that they were grateful that the new relationship began with such prompt intensity. Unlike the past relationship, these new relationships began within a context of active support illustrated by caring, healthy, and mutually enjoyable conversations. Alexis illustrated this as she reminisced about running into someone she went to school with years before. Her interactions with him inspired her to initiate a series of positive changes in her life.

*Alexis: The second I walked in and saw him, it was seriously love at first sight…*

*I’ve never in my life felt, felt that before, and so I knew right then… I was like, okay I’m not happy where I am right now, I’m totally settling, I’m in this relationship that I don’t even want to be in it. I’m not happy with it and I’m not happy with settling [for living here]. [This new man] is in [a different city] and I’m supposed to be in [that city]… I think I need to do this. I think I need to take a risk in my life for the first time, you know, and so I did.*

For Alexis, the context of a new relationship provided an important element in her transition process. The new partner’s location near a city to which she had long wanted to move combined with their intense mutual attraction to create a desirable opportunity to
make many positive changes at once. This microcontext provided a positive foundation from which to build and maintain her current-long term relationship with him. They continue to grow in their relationship together through their enjoyment of where they live and how they became a couple.

Ginger had an established friendship with her current partner that helped her to get through her violent relationship. They expressed their interest in each other but waited to start dating until immediately after they each broke up with their former significant others.

_Ginger: It wasn’t afterwards honestly. It was kind of during. I... started to write to, to correspond with... him. And at the time, I mean I had known him for so long and he was involved with a relationship and so was I. Neither of us were, were disrespectful of our current relationships at the time. They both ended... Technically I ended my relationship with [my ex-partner] before [we got together]._

Their friendship had spanned many years before they began dating, and both were aware of the other’s difficult dating history, as they acted as support systems for each other. This groundwork of caring and platonic friendship created a strong basis as their relationship evolved into a committed, romance. Their microcontext and background allowed them to start their intimate relationship quickly after Ginger left her violent former partner.

Others started the new relationship more slowly. Ann cherished the opportunity to proceed cautiously and enjoyed the process of getting to know her new partner before their first date.
Ann: I signed up on... these online, uh, dating things... We had a lot of things in common that we liked, uh, that interested us, and then once we got to emailing back and forth... it just really felt very comfortable, very safe and very comfortable... I had signed the end of one email, “Talk to you later” and he just shot right back, “Okay, here’s my phone number, call me”... it just blew me away, it was like, “Now what do I do,” [Laughter] so I called him and... we just spent hours and hours on the phone talking, you know he was in [another state] and I was here and that felt very, very safe for me to get to know someone like that because that was something that [my ex-partner] and I did not do, um, was just talk.

Ann’s illustration notes the importance of the microcontext of comfort and communication with her current partner, especially as it compared to the microcontext of communication in her prior relationship. After spending a period of time single, Ann said that she felt lonely. With encouragement from a friend who had already co-created her own survivor-couple, Ann joined a dating website and developed a mutual attraction with her current partner. This story of how they met gives insight into the role of the microcontext in Ann’s transition from single-hood to her current relationship.

After deciding to remain single for some time, MS unexpectedly enjoyed her first meeting with her current partner at a restaurant, but waited until she felt comfortable before seeing him again. Their early conversations established him as a caring potential partner, and began a lasting pattern of open communication, patience and teamwork that continued when they transitioned into a committed relationship.
MS: We just carried on this... easy-going, nonchalant conversation... It was comfortable... and before he left he gave me his card. He said, “Hey, why don’t you call me sometime?” I’m like, “I’m not going to call you!” [Laughter] He said, “Well, just in case, take it anyway.”... You know that did it, right? [Laughter] It was that whole “this is all about you.” [Laughter] It was a completely different, even from the very beginning, completely different set of... responses that came from him... [A]bout two months later... we ended up going out and he pretty much started out, this was the really weird and different thing about our relationship, he pretty much started out asking me all the things that my ex did so he would make sure he didn’t repeat that... I told him, [Laughter]

“These are the things you can do. These are the things you can’t do.”

MS and her new partner laid the foundation for their relationship with clear communication that valued her past experiences, and the importance of that history to the success of their own relationship. This microcontext of mutual communication and teamwork allowed them to co-create a strong survivor-couple based on these shared values.

These illustrations of supportive and enjoyable nonviolent partners help to support the Microsystemic Context section of the analysis. Their interactions with the interviewees were necessarily linked to the background and context of their current nonviolent relationships. For more information on the support provided by current significant others you may wish to review the interview summaries in Appendix H. These interview summaries were edited by the relevant participant, and offer information on the nature of both relationships as well as the context of the interview. They were not
included in the analysis of the data, and were written for the purpose of rigor and context development.

All of the participants in this study spoke at length about the origin of their current relationships and how it set the tone for continued, healthy and supportive interactions. For some, the new relationship ushered them quickly from the former relationship or single-hood into a new, more enjoyable context. Others began with a longer period of getting to know each other. Regardless of the speed, the caring and intimate way in which these relationships began had a great deal of influence on the participant and continued to contribute to their healthy relationship. Throughout the transition, many other entities also influenced the process for better or worse. These Important Others were frequently mentioned by interviewees.

*Important Others*

Former and current partners were not the only people to influence participants’ transitions. A wide range of people, organizations, and others had a direct influence; some were supportive, others were not. These frequently took the form of: family members (especially mothers and children); members of the participants’ current or former places of worship; and co-workers and supervisors. However, the list of others was long, diverse, and not limited to individual people. Statements about Important Others detailed the role of specific individuals, groups, deities, media or organizations with an important level of direct interactions, including maintaining neutrality or distance. Important Others played a vital role in every story and existed across the time span of transitions.
Unsupportive others generally took the form of friends, family members, and peers in religious communities. A few of the participants had intensely negative experiences with members of the legal system. Interviewees were most likely to point out when others actively behaved in unsupportive ways, but there were also many scattered mentions of others who passively withheld support.

Napoleon recalled that many of his co-workers and friends realized there was a problem, but generally did not attempt to intervene or assist him. Their lack of support contributed to a difficult situation.

*Napoleon: They could see it in my eyes when I looked at her, really. I mean, yeah, they could see it in my eyes like… “He’s a strong man, but… he’s stuck,” you know what I mean. “He looks like he’s trapped in a prison,” you know what I mean… They didn’t ask questions or anything.*

Although Napoleon’s co-workers were aware that he was in an unhealthy relationship, they rarely expressed concern, offered assistance, or asked how to help. This contributed to Napoleon’s sense of being “stuck” in the relationship, as he was surrounded by people who could not, or would not, reach out to him. These others contributed to his negative context, probably unintentionally, by refusing to acknowledge it and offer assistance.

The unsupportive others in Napoleon’s example stood idle while he was involved in the violent relationship. For some interviewees, unsupportive others also existed during single-hood. People in Sasha’s life did not want her to be single, because she was a woman. After she left her violent relationship they were unsupportive of her transition, in spite of her desire to leave her abusive former partner.
Sasha: It was scary because, of course, I’m from the [traditional South] and people here would rather you be in a relationship than... be alone... especially as a woman and especially from where I’m from, so I, I kind of got tired of, “Why did you guys break up?”... all of the time.

Sasha was frequently asked to explain and defend her decision to terminate the violent relationship. These unsupportive others caused her stress and made a microcontext in which it was more difficult to heal. As a result, she seized an opportunity to study abroad in a more egalitarian area of Europe where she was able to develop her sense of independence and gain skills that became useful in her later, nonviolent relationship.

The legal system was a highly influential source of unsupportive others for some of the participants. Police and judges often failed to support them when they were at risk during the relationship and during on-going custody and stalking proceedings. This is illustrated in a story from ST about her experiences with the police after she was brutally attacked on the night she left.

ST: You know, I’ve got my [very young] son, and they, they kept telling me, “Well, you need to find somebody to come get you because we, we got dinner. We’ve got wives at home waiting to cook dinner for us.”... I said, “I’m not leaving until I’m able to get some stuff,” so they made him leave... We had packed up the car and couldn’t leave. He had taken all the fuses out of the car while the officer stood in the garage with him.

ST’s interview contained many illustrations of institutional violence inflicted by police officers and the courts. These unsupportive others had a great deal of impact by reducing her access to resources that would have otherwise been available, and supporting her
former partner’s efforts to continue the violent relationship, and then to gain full custody of their child. This microcontext greatly shaped her efforts throughout her transition process.

While every participant was largely supported in their current relationship, there were some specific exceptions. Occasionally family members and others were unsupportive of their transitions into new, nonviolent relationships. Savanah continues to be judged for her past involvement in a violent relationship, as some people question the validity of her current marriage.

*Savanah: And, you know it’s funny because... sometimes I don’t even like to say “domestic violence” because people just look at you...*

Savanah also expressed concern with the stereotypes of “ruined” IPV survivors presented by the media, too. These comments illustrate the ongoing negative microcontext that unsupportive others can have on the transition process.

Examples of supportive others also filled the interviews. Supportive others were friends, family, fellow worshippers, and the occasional police officer. However, they also occurred in more diverse forms not included in the list of unsupportive others; cat-calling construction workers, children, God, books, house-mates, therapists, neighbors and individuals that later became partners were all included in this category. Similar to unsupportive others, they appeared at all points in the transition process and were highly influential.

Ann remains friends with a woman she met at church. Together they returned to school in spite of their abusive husbands and became financially independent. Years later
they supported each other during their divorces and their transition into nonviolent relationships.

*Ann:* There was a woman and her family that moved into the area that was in the same church... We automatically identified with each other that there was some underlying sense of rebellion, down deep somewhere [Laughter]... [We] hit it off and... after a couple of years there was a program through the vo-tech for displaced home workers that... she had read about in the paper and talked me into going with her, and we got scholarships and grants and things... I remember going home and telling my husband I was going to go back to school because if anything happened to him, I had no way to provide for our kids... He was very angry... [and there was] always that sense that I didn’t have a right to make decisions, so this, this was huge and I remember finally saying to him, “I don’t care, I’m doing it.”

Ann’s friend was also in a controlling relationship, but the two women were able to support each other throughout their transitions. They were supportive others for each other. By working with this friend to create a positive element within their microcontexts, Ann was able to set a limit with her violent partner and earn her degree. This had important ramifications on her transition process, as it led to later employment and social support networks.

Some of the most emotional parts of the interviews came when women spoke about the support they received from their children. For these participants, their children provided awareness, motivation, and a strong sense of purpose in the midst of chaos and violence. Children also supported the participants through the process of leaving, single-
hood, and sometimes even the establishment of new, nonviolent relationships. ST shared touching memories of a week when her son publicly supported her for leaving her ex-partner.

ST: The teacher told... all the kids [to] go stand by the thing that you’re most thankful for... All the kids are standing by the candy, the toys. My son is the only one who goes and stands by the [sign] You. He goes, “Because my mom’s important to me.” [Crying] ... That Sunday in church they get the kids gathered right before they go out to go to their little class and um they say a kid can say a prayer. Well, my son never speaks in front of anybody ever, and um the church was full and he raised his hand to say the prayer that day... and he goes out there and he goes well, “I’m just happy my mom got out because I kept telling her to get out but she wouldn’t leave”... at that point I knew that he was... fine with it... [even though] the older people in the church said, “You’ve got to work it out for the child.”

ST’s illustration shows two important points. First, it gives an example of her son’s ongoing support throughout the transition process, even publicly. Secondly, it also demonstrated his ability to confront unsupportive others and reduce their impact in her life. Many vocal members of her church did not want her to leave her former partner in spite of his substance abuse and extreme violence. Her son helped to create a microcontext that gave her strength to face those supportive others. Later in her story, she shared how he continued to support her by encouraging her relationship with her current nonviolent partner.
While some of the most supportive Important Others were current partners, they were not included in this category. Rather, those illustrations helped to support the Partner and Survivor-Couple portion of the Microsystemic Context analysis section. Their interactions with the interviewees were necessarily linked to the background and context of their current nonviolent relationships, while the supportive Important Others were not involved in this committed, romantic relationship. As stated earlier, more information regarding the support provided by current significant can be found in the interview summaries in Appendix H.

Supportive others took many forms, and were a regular feature of every interview. They influenced participants at every step in their transitions and were missed when they did not exist. Important Others, both supportive and unsupportive, joined with the Abuser and Abuser-Couple and the Partner and Survivor-Couples to compose the Microsystemic Conditions category. This category consisted of specific others who interacted directly with participants throughout their transitions.

*Macrosystemic Conditions*

Macrosystemic Conditions is the third category, with Increase in Risk and Strengths and Microsystemic Conditions, that forms the background for Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood. Macrosystemic Conditions compose the general, large-scale interactions that co-create the context for actions that interviewees took during the process of transition. The data in this category are focused on the role of history of both the violent and non-violent partners before they met the interviewee, the implications of culture and comparisons to other relationship, and external negative events stemming from sources unrelated to either relationship.
Partners’ Histories

Almost every participant commented on the backgrounds of their violent partner and their current partner. The ex-partners generally had troubled histories that interviewees felt sometimes explained, but never excused, their behavior. Conversely, the current partners who had difficult childhoods or also came from abusive relationships were credited with overcoming those difficulties in order to offer support and co-create mutually enjoyable relationships. These nonviolent partners sometimes used negative past experiences to gain special knowledge used to support interviewees, and to bond over somewhat common ground with them. In contrast, violent partners sometimes used similar experiences as a basis for their own abusive behaviors. In these ways, the history-based macrosystemic context had a strong impact on the transition processes of participants in this study.

Ann shared a story in which her ex-partner stated his interest in continuing his family legacy of violence. His past impacted their relationship, and thus her transition process, by giving a pattern of violence from which to base his own violent goals and behaviors.

*Ann: After we had children and they were... young adolescent ages... He told me that one of the reasons he wanted to become a father was so he could beat kids like he’d been beaten.*

Ann’s partner’s history of victimization became the catalyst for his violent goals regarding his family and children. This provided a disastrous element of the macrosystemic context of Ann’s transition. Ann took many risks in order to ensure that her children were safe, well-raised and independent throughout her lengthy process of
developing the resources to terminate her violent relationship. In turn, they became pivotal in her story by assisting her in establishing herself in single-hood once they were adults.

Layla noted that her ex-partner held grudges from his prior failed relationships, lingering effects of institutional abuse from police, and other situations. She felt that this, combined with his “way of thinking,” influenced how he treated her when they started dating.

*Layla: I spent... years with a man who, because of his own messed up way of thinking, took his anger out on me for past relationships, what other people did, other people’s mistakes and made them my problem and talked down to me in a way that I’ve [never] experienced anybody else doing... to me before.*

For Layla’s former partner, it seemed that he could not turn his prior violent experiences into knowledge for the creation of a nonviolent relationship with her. This macrosystemic context impacted her process of transition out of the relationship, and continues to impact their current platonic friendship.

Sara’s partner was sexually abused as a child and did not receive the necessary care to deal with it, further exacerbating the negative impact of those experiences. Sara credited this experience as making her partner soft and vulnerable, and with the development of their relationship into a “volatile” one.

*Sara: My partner at that time was, she had been sexually abused as a child and she had a lot of... emotional issues. She was a real drama queen and... she’d come from a real um, relatively hard background. She didn’t have... healthy...*
tools within her arsenal in dealing with emotions, so there was a lot of yelling and screaming and there was a lot of emotional abuse.

During Sara’s interview she emphasized that her relationship with her former partner was full of both positive and negative experiences. In this quote, she notes the impact of the prior abuse on her partner’s verbal volatility. At other points in the interview she linked it to positive attributes that attracted Sara to her. This macrosystemic context of past sexual abuse, followed by neglect, had a strong impact on their relationship and thus Sara’s transition process.

These aspects of the macrosystemic context, stemming from the violent partner’s own experiences of prior abuse, are included because of the on-going effect on the relationship and thus the transition process. While they may have laid the foundation for later violent behavior for these former partners, some current partners (and the interviewees) demonstrated that similar situations could also have a positive psychosocial effect. For this reason, prior experiences of violence were not seen as initiators of the violent relationship, but rather as phenomena that had an ongoing impact on the transition process.

Although some ex-partners had suffered abuse in the past, fueling their violent relationships, current partners who had been abused used the commonality as a way to bond with interviewees and build a healthy relationship. Ginger and Ann’s current partners had undesirable experiences in past relationships, as well, and they used their histories as strengths.

Ann: [We both contribute] experience. We both had... difficult relationships... That experience of knowing what we don’t want, I think is huge... We’re both
responsible people. We like to know that... we’re taking care of what we should be taking care of.

Ginger: I feel like understanding is what we bring the most because both of us have been through a lot of bullshit, and a lot of cheating, a lot of lying, a lot of just hard times, and we don’t have that with each other. We have a very, very strong and just absolutely stable trust in each other. I mean, we’ve got a magnetic attraction, and we’ve got... physical attraction, we’ve got emotional stability.

Ann and Ginger both bonded with their current partners over their prior “difficult relationships.” In fact, these experiences gave all of them special “understanding” and the ability to take “care of what we should be taking care of.” That macrosystemic context helped contribute to experiences of “physical attraction” and “emotional stability” in both relationships.

Not all partners had a history of prior violence or “difficult relationships.” Some came from a background during which they demonstrated positive attributes and a caring personality. Alexis did not mention any history of abuse for her current partner; he simply had a history of being a caring person.

Alexis: I’ve known [my current partner] for like ten years and we were good friends in high school and um, I knew him well then. I knew what kind of person he was and um he really hasn’t changed much since then... I really knew from the very beginning that it was never going to be like the past... because [of] just his demeanor and his personality and how precious he is, you know, to me.
Alexis’s awareness of her current partner’s macrosystemic context gave her the necessary knowledge to know her relationship with him “was never going to be like the past” relationship.

There were many instances in which participants linked an ex-partner’s past to later violent behavior. At the same time, prior hardships were regularly related as a strength that current partners brought to the relationship, granting them shared understanding and dedication to building a positive relationship. Some ex-partners and current partners with no mentioned history of abuse were also brought up in the interviews. Interviewees tended to notice that nonviolent partners without a difficult history had an established record of being good friends and partners. Partners’ Histories were considered in nearly every interview and formed an aspect of the Macrosystemic Conditions of the transition.

**Culture and Comparisons**

Macrosystemic Conditions span not only time, but also larger cultural implications. Culture and Comparisons reflected an important awareness of larger scale influences, joining with Partners’ Histories and External Negative Events to create the Macrosystemic Conditions category. Some influences in this category took the form of societal stereotypes and assumptions; other times this type of influence was reflected in comparisons between the current relationship and other couples.

ST struggled with the implications of the myriad cultural assumptions that impacted her violent relationship. As a young mother, she was keenly aware that it was particularly undesirable for her to get divorced. She hoped that a change in location would make her husband stop drinking, but the police in her new hometown endorsed the
stereotype that a violent, drunken husband should be told to sober up and then left alone. They also supported the stereotype that domestic violence is a private, family concern.

*ST: I thought... he’ll change. I don’t want to get a divorce, I’m too young. Moved here and four months after we moved here, he came home drunk and again pulled another gun at us. The police here didn’t do anything. They just had him go sober up.*

The cultural stereotypes surrounding young, divorced mothers discouraged ST from leaving her violent relationship. Apathy from the police added further difficulties as she struggled to build resources and seek support. In spite of their strong impact on her transition process, she eventually overcame these cultural stereotypes and terminated the relationship.

Participants were often aware that participating in these interviews directly confronted assumptions about IPV survivors. This led some to inquire about confidentiality, while others would have preferred to use their own names. Most voiced their desire to contribute to a larger effort to confront these stereotypes by participating in this study. Near the end of her interview, Savanah stopped to reflect on the process of participating in this study. She discussed the distress and isolation caused by the common negative stereotypes of abused women.

*Savanah: I can’t tell you how... important all this is, and what you’re doing... I mean I’ve never really thought about this before, but... I’m so glad that you’re saying that people are okay and you’ve talked to a lot of people that are... like me, and because you see on TV and it’s always, “You’re a broken person.”*
The cultural assumptions that Savanah discusses uphold the faulty belief that IPV survivors cannot ever be “okay,” and so there are few “people that are... like [her].” It is likely that these cultural assumptions were also felt by the other participants, and that it impacted their transition processes. Many participants expressed their hopes that this study would give the public, and other IPV survivors, a more positive perspective on their potential for relational and individual resilience.

Sometimes data applying to Culture and Comparisons were positive. Sasha was aware of two conflicting stereotypes that could be applied to women who were no longer in a violent relationship. While she noted that there is an assumption that IPV survivors will go back to the abuse, she utilized the generalization that the second long-term relationship can be dramatically different from the first.

*Sasha: I think your... second time, you’re... more open to change. I guess some women go back to the same guys, but I was just willing to... try a different type of guy.*

This cultural assumption about the positive aspects of relationship experience supported Sasha’s belief in her ability to find a later nonviolent relationship. Indeed, she made a public announcement to her friends that she would try dating a wider range of men after leaving her first relationship and spending some time as a single woman. Shortly after, she met her current partner and they built a mutually enjoyable, nonviolent relationship together.

Comparisons of the current relationship to other relationships were also included in this category. Several participants compared themselves to other couples in ways that increased their appreciation for their own relationship. Sometimes these conversations
took place within their relationships, other times the participants used these comparisons as illustrators within the interview. Comparisons between the current nonviolent relationship and the past, violent relationship were not included in this category; rather, they were seen as part of the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent relationships and are included in that analysis category. MS and her significant other use these comparisons when they speak to each other.

*MS*: *We see that... a lot of other couples can’t seem to communicate honestly with one another. These are... some of the conversations that the two of us have... I’ll ask him... about his brother and, and his brother’s wife and I’ll be like... “Why do you think they’re struggling so much with this situation and why don’t you think that happens with us?”*

For MS and her partner, comparisons like this offer the opportunity try to learn more about their own success. Such conversations also affirm their mutual appreciation for their own relationship. Several participants mentioned the use of comparisons as a way of bonding over the quality of their survivor-couple relationship.

Culture and Comparisons focused on the interviewees’ stories of the impact of cultural assumptions and comparisons with other relationships on their transition. Some of these had a negative impact, but in other instances the situations cultural assumptions and comparisons served a positive purpose. Cultural Comparisons combined with Partners’ Histories and External Negative Events to create the Macrosystemic Conditions category.
External Negative Events

Many participants mentioned External Negative Events during their interviews. These were not events and situations that were directly related to either relationship, nor were they a symptom of, or contributor to, the violent relationship. Health problems, crime victimization and deaths in the family were included in this category. While most participants said relatively little about External Negative Events, they played a central role for some. Regardless of the amount of time dedicated to discussing them, these External Negative Events were noted as having an impact on the transitions.

Alexis shared the most about an External Negative Event. After ending her violent relationship, she became acquaintances with another man that she had no interest in dating. He stalked her and then attempted to kill her during a violent attack. This led to a lengthy court battle with results that she deemed unjust. The attack and the resulting legal battle caused more significant lingering effects than her violent relationship, according to Alexis.

Alexis: He found me [downtown] and, um uh, [sigh] long story short um when I was leaving he got in my car and refused to get out and... he beat me up, so I spent the next mmm, on and off for a year in court... He just um got more probation because he was already on probation... No jail time and nothing... He was supposed to pay for all the damage that he caused because he not only beat me up, but he um he beat up my car as well though but he never had to, to pay for any of that either, so he just got off scotch free and um, so I went from an abusive year long relationship into an even more abusive... non-relationship... Which
really, really affected me... that was... years ago... I’m still having nightmares about it and still having to deal with it.

Although Alexis’s year-long violent relationship was very difficult for her, it is this External Negative Event that continues to give her nightmares. According to Alexis, she depends on her current partner for more support regarding this attack than for any lingering difficulties stemming from the prior violent relationship. This external event has had a strong impact on her transition process by causing long-term struggles, as she described.

Two participants noted the impact of the death of a parent and considered how it may have made them more likely to seek a relationship with the ex-partner for support, caring or “structure.” Several participants also noted specific health problems that further complicated the violent relationship. Health issues also impacted the current relationship by causing stress but, unlike the violent relationship, they also provided opportunities for bonding and support between partners. No illustrations are provided for the impact of deaths or illness in order to protect the interviewees’ confidentiality.

Partners’ Histories, Culture and Comparisons and External Negative Events make up the category of Macrosystemic Conditions. This category combines with Microsystemic Conditions, which includes specific or direct interactions with a range of entities, and Increases in Risks and Strengths; together, these categories influenced the changes that occurred between the phenomenon of the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships and the consequences of Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.
Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships

The central phenomenon or event that makes the prior three categories important, and that is targeted by Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood, is the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships. It is this central idea that launched the study, and so every aspect of the results is readily related to it in some way. This category contains data that exemplify the act of transition. Participants frequently offered insight on the role of Differentiation and Comparison between the two relationships and their own Shifting Roles over time. They also spoke about Later Smoothness and Struggles regarding lingering effects with which they had to cope after the end of the violent relationship.

Differentiation and Comparison

All of the participants spent a great deal of time engaged in Differentiation and Comparison between the two relationships. These statements universally indicated differences between the violent and nonviolent relationships, favoring the current relationship. They emphasized the difference and separation between the current partner and the ex-partner, and between the past and present relationships. Not only did participants offer Differentiation and Comparison during the interview, they also cited many instances during the current relationship where they and their partners made these statements to each other. A few of the participants noted times when they failed to do this, which led to a stressful conflict that was resolved by emphasizing the Differentiation and Comparison to each other.

Ann often illustrated the joy and support within her current relationship with comparisons between her relationships. At one point Ann paused while recalling how
difficult her ex-partner made it to go to school in order to compare it with support she now receives for her commitments.

Ann: Now I have a partner who understands when I have a bad day at work… I come home and they say... “Sit down, let me, what can I do?”... At that point in my life it was, “When is dinner going to be on the table, and why isn’t this done and the other thing.”

As Ann demonstrated, these comparisons emphasize the difference between both relationships and both partners. She emphasizes her appreciation for her current partner by contrasting him with her former partner. This type of comparison clearly states that a transition has happened; she has successfully left a negative relationship and co-created a positive one with a very different partner.

This form of description was useful in illustrating behaviors in the new relationship, as well as things the old partner did that the new partner does not. Layla used Differentiation and Comparison to describe her current partner in terms of things he does not do, that were common behaviors for her former partner.

Layla: He’s an artist and he definitely has a passion for many things and the way that he expresses himself is completely different than how the other guy did, always did. He can talk to me in a way that doesn’t make me feel that I’m being chastised by a parent.

Layla also demonstrated the transition from a verbally violent relationship to a nonviolent one through comparisons such as this. A change had taken place, and this is made clear through the differences in communication between the two relationships.
Partners in the current relationship also engaged in a great deal of Differentiation and Comparison with each other. Alexis turns to her partner when she needs to talk about the violence from her prior relationship, marking a distinct difference between the two. She is comforted when he emphasizes her current status as member of a healthy couple in which she will no longer face such violence.

Alexis: He’s supportive, you know, like, “I’m so sorry that happened to you and I’ll never let it happen to you again.”

Not only does Alexis’s current partner confirm her transition by differentiating this relationship from the last one, he also uses it as an opportunity to demonstrate his desire to protect her from any outside influence that would harm her in similar ways. Her story showed the transition that took place, using the words of her partner as he differentiates this relationship from the prior one.

Marta and her partner sometimes pondered how her ex-partner has been able to prey on so many capable women. Neither of them understands how he is able to do this, demonstrating how her current partner and their relationship are different from the prior one.

Marta: [My currently partner] said it, “How does he do this, he finds really smart, pretty women to take care of him, how does he do this,” and I’m like, “I don’t know. Ask him.”

For Marta and her current partner, conversations such as this assert the transition that has occurred through an affirmation of the contrast between relationships. They are able to bond over their joint confusion over the behavior of her former partner in their prior relationship, and with the women he later dated.
Marta also provided an example of how failing to differentiate and compare can lead to an intense confrontation between partners that must be resolved by prompt statements of Differentiation and Comparison. Similar situations were also noted by other interviewees.

_Marta: I have to get the words just right because it’s really important... he said, “I’m starting to understand why [your ex-partner] popped you,” or something like that and I said, “How dare you.” I said, “Don’t you ever, ever say anything like that again!” And he said, “That was so inappropriate.” He said, “I am so sorry,” and then he said, “All I’m trying to say it’s so frustrating,” and I said, “You know what, you know what, that’s two different things”... And I said, “You’re frustrated. I’m frustrated too, but I would never say, oh you know I so understand why [your ex-partner] broke that cake on top of your head”...and he was, “Oh my God”... It was so unlike him._

Marta illustrated the importance of consistently reinforcing the differentiation between relationships by making comparisons that offered contrast in favor of the current relationship. When Marta’s partner drew a correlation between his feelings and the actions of the prior violent partner, Marta was quick to respond. She illustrated how distressing the comment was by stating that she would never make a similar correlation with his former violent partner. He expressed his understanding, and she noted that the episode was out of character for her partner. Other interviewees mentioned similar incidents that were also resolved by reasserting the contrast between relationships, and noted that such conflicts were very rare in the current relationship. Several interviewees
also noted that it was essential to recognize the difference between relationships at all times, when considering problems that might impact other survivor-couples.

Interviewees frequently compared both relationships in order to respond to interview questions, and during these comparisons relayed conversations with their current partners. These statements consistently emphasized the polarity of both partners and relationships, showing the benefits of the nonviolent couple. Some participants shared instances in which a member of the current couple tried to point out similarities, which always led to distress that was resolved through emphatic Differentiation and Comparison. These situations demonstrate and define the phenomenon of Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships.

*Shifting Roles*

Important transitions for the participants were also made outside of their current relationships. Participants discussed a myriad of ways in which they ceased to consider themselves as abused or powerless in favor of other identities and tasks. All of the participants who had children in the violent relationship cited many times when they were entirely focused on protecting their children at the cost of managing the violence directed at them. Some participants maintained a friendship with their ex-partner for some time after the end of the relationship, but only under established conditions that they enforced. Others expressed a sense of “isolation” from other survivors of IPV, due to a vague sense of being different or more successful in “moving on.” Most of the participants expressed a strong desire to help others to get out of violent relationships. This marked another instance of Shifting Roles by moving to “the other side of the window.”
Ann provided many examples of the dedication and love that drove interviewees with children to shift roles. During the violent relationship, Ann consistently prioritized the well-being of her children above her own. Long before she was able to accumulate the resources necessary to end the relationship, she still risked her own safety to protect her children by drawing the brunt of the violence.

*Ann:* [My daughter] was so scared she had crawled under the bed and he had pulled her out by her hair and I, I just, I remember standing in the hallway saying, “God, you can kill me, but I’m going to go save my kid,” and um, so I stopped that, but even, even after all that, I still, I still stood up for him because he was the man, the father.

In this example Ann shifted from a partner seeking to minimize the violence of a relationship to the role of a protective parent ready to die for her child’s safety. This demonstrated her ability to make temporary transitions in role within the larger process of transitioning from a violent to a nonviolent relationship.

Five participants Shifted Roles after termination of the violent romance by maintaining friendships with their ex-partners. Some have since drifted apart; others continue to stay in touch. All of them established strict boundaries by which their ex-partners had to abide in order to continue the friendship, the most common of which was an end to the violence.

Layla missed her ex-partner after she ended their relationship, and is glad to have him as a friend now. However, she created a shift in their communication, and thus their relationship, by demonstrating that she was also capable of saying things that would hurt him deeply and ceasing to “initiate contact” with him.
Layla: *I was always the one that initiated contact with him and after I said and did the hurtful things to him to get him out of my life, he came back around and contacted me and we have been able to maintain a very strong relationship.*

This illustrates Layla’s shift from the role of partner who is seeking to manage conflict and violence within the relationship to one who left the relationship with the power to refuse to tolerate such interactions. When her former partner begins to communicate negatively, she now ends the conversation and waits for him to calm down and call her back at a later time. This is a stark illustration of the shift of roles involved in her transition out of a violent relationship with him, even though they are still friends.

Most participants said that they hoped that their contribution to the research would help others who were struggling with IPV. Many also shared examples of their outreach and advocacy efforts. Sasha noted that she sees herself as being in a different place now, “in the house” instead of outside of it, looking in.

Sasha: *I guess I’m just trying to look at it through the other side of the window, I’m in the house now.*

This statement marked Shifting Roles to “the other side of the window.” She uses this new position to assist friends who are experiencing relationship violence. Sasha now sees herself as an active agent in larger efforts to combat violence in relationships, instead of someone in need of help.

Napoleon doesn’t talk about his violent past often. He does, however, discuss it if he believes it will help someone. He is no longer someone at risk; he has shifted to someone with special knowledge on how to assist others.
Napoleon: There was one girl came in with a black eye and I sat down and I was like look... “I've had my ass kicked by my partner” ... I explained to her and she, she took that and she, I mean she was really cool, she... opened up to me and she’s like, “I really appreciate you coming to me like that,” she’s like, “Most people just want to put a arm around me and, and tell me to leave... but they don’t know, they don’t know what its like”... so you know we got her into a situation where she was able to find some help... It was great.

Napoleon’s illustration demonstrates the knowledge he has gained from his transition process. The woman with which he spoke valued his unique insight and it allowed them to be able to work together on her goal of leaving the relationship. Napoleon had shifted from the role of someone who needed (but did not receive) assistance from his coworkers to an employer that was able to reach out to abused employees. This illustrates the shift in roles that is inherent in the transition from violent relationships to nonviolent relationships.

Sasha has made the same shift. She also views her past experiences as a source of valuable information that she can use to help other people. She does this by sharing her story with others who need help and understanding.

Sasha: I use it as like a, a tool to help others who are in crappy relationships.

Sasha considers the wisdom she gained from her transition to be a “tool to help others.” She is no longer someone in a violent relationship, she is now someone with special resources for helping others. This demonstrates her engagement in the transition process.

Marta expressed a feeling hinted at by a few participants, a sensation of being different from other people who had experienced IPV. Like some other participants, she
did not feel that victims’ therapy groups were a good fit for her. In fact, Marta felt fundamentally different from the stereotypical “survivor,” and from those she met at targeted support groups.

*Marta: I feel like I really should do more as a survivor... slash thriver and I know.*

*When I did codependency counseling... my therapist sent me to a support group [for domestic violence survivors] and I went to two of them and then said, “I feel like a fraud... these women are like sitting in their garages trying to commit suicide and I’m so not there and I feel like I have no right to be part of this circle and, and yet,” but do you understand the weirdness?... Think how I look now to these women... I think... that they would quietly say to themselves, “What, what the fuck does she know about my life?”*

Few interviewees utilized victim-targeted services, with the significant exception of obtaining necessary food, housing and legal assistance. Some sought mental health care from general providers or for other concerns, like Marta’s codependency counseling, but only two disclosed seeking therapy specifically for the impact of domestic violence. Marta’s words illustrate a stark shift in roles, as she recognizes herself as a “survivor,” but also as a “thriver.” The latter aspect separates her, and demonstrates her transition process.

Examples like these show that interviewees have experienced Shifting Roles. They do not feel that they have much in common with other survivors of IPV, and rarely made use of targeted therapeutic assistance. Instead, they are on the other side of the situation and use their experience as a source of knowledge to help those who continue to struggle with violent relationships in a way that others cannot.
Shifting Roles are situations in which the interviewee offers information that illuminates the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships by demonstrating a change in identity. Parents like Ann shifted from the role of a partner seeking to manage the level of violence to protective individuals willing to draw lethal harm from their ex-partners to protect their children. Some, like Layla, shifted by establishing firm rules for continued friendship that their ex-partners were not permitted to break. All of the interviewees shared stories that explored instances in which they struggled during the process of transition, or when it was smooth.

*Later Smoothness and Struggles*

Some participants had a relatively smooth transition between relationships, and stated that they had little or no specific problems related to having been in a violent couple. Most, however, had certain areas in which they continued to struggle after the end of the violent relationship. Continuing struggles included physical and emotional difficulties that stemmed from, and lingered after, the termination of the violent relationship. Regardless of the ease or difficulty involved, explorations such as these are direct reflections of the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships.”

For many participants, their most significant ongoing problems were only a memory. Often participants talked about continuing struggles that they had already resolved as a part of their transition. Ginger shared a lingering difficulty that both she and her current partner had after their violent relationships. However, they had already resolved the concern.

*Ginger: Definitely. We both, we both had tons of trust, trust issues, tons of trust issues. I mean, we definitely had to overcome... It has...been a long time, like*
Ginger and her current partner both experienced infidelity in their prior relationships, as well as other problems. They struggled with the resulting trust issues at the beginning of the relationship, but were able to resolve them and “absolutely trust” in each other. This change illustrates another aspect of the transition process in which participants encountered and worked to address lingering effects from prior parts of the process.

Savanah shared an ongoing problem that still happens, but which she and her current partner are able to manage it together. She is satisfied with their approach to the concern and considers it resolved.

*Savanah:* I still [get] so scared that at any moment there’s just going to be a bomb dropped… [I was scared that] he’s just going to do something to ruin [my relationship]… When we got married [I realized that] I don’t care. Let him come because I’ve got somebody to protect me and I don’t have to deal with this by myself.

For Savanah, getting married to her partner helped resolve her fear that her former partner might suddenly “do something to ruin” her nonviolent relationship. She and her partner have resolved this fear and she is now confident that her former partner could not do that, if he tried. This resolution of past issues further illustrates her transition process, as residual concerns from the prior relationship fade away.

During MS’s interview, she revealed a wide range of continuing struggles shared by other participants that were related to making the transition. She succeeded in difficult
efforts to raise her self-esteem, find positive aspects of the past relationship, combat poverty, and protect her children from lengthy legal threats from their father.

*MS:* For the first two years after I left his relationship, I spent so much time trying to pull myself up. I mean my self-esteem was lower than dirt. I spent so much time just kicking my tail... And it was a real battle to, to come to terms with... trying to find a silver lining in all of that... It was really, really difficult and I didn’t get any therapy and I didn’t get any assistance, and probably should have, but you know you have zero money and [Laughter] and... children and nothing but your vehicle and the clothes on your back. You’re not thinking therapy [Laughter]... It was this huge battle of course because... he wasn’t about to let the children go without an argument... So it was this huge battle in the courts.

MS’s efforts to resolve her continuing struggles, as well as the struggles themselves, marked her transition out of the violent relationship and into single-hood.

ST had many of the same concerns. She and her current partner still work together to deal with her ex-partner’s continued stalking and violence while facing resistance from a consistently unsupportive legal system. She spoke about what happened after she and her child moved away from the former partner.

*ST:* The abuse of me stopped; well, it stopped for awhile. He just would harass me by slashing my tires, but then he did um drop my child off one day and gave me another black eye... He was mad, I guess... He got off on that because it was first offense here, so he got one year good behavior... Now he takes it out on my son, so now the abuse has continued. Our son... had [multiple] police reports filed.
He’s cut my son’s face... Now that he can’t get me he goes on to our son. He’s back in that cycle of violence and there’s nothing I can do.

ST’s struggles continue as her former partner engages in continued violence against her and her son. However, these attacks are no longer within the context of a relationship, and ST and her current partner use all of the resources they can to work to resolve these ongoing struggles. This change in approach, and in relational context, signals her transition from a violent to a nonviolent relationship.

Sara reported a smooth transition and doesn’t experience problems in her current life or relationship that stem from her past relationship. However, when normal problems come up in the relationship, they might remind her of her ex-partner when she would not otherwise think about her.

Sara: The messiness... and the nagging, of course... That always pushes my buttons a little bit, so I mean um, but it, it wasn’t a real problem because it, it wasn’t that intense... it’s just little. Every once in a while it’d come up but it’s not a big deal... I think it’s pretty regular... It just reminds me of [my ex-partner].

For Sara, normal conflicts about “messiness” sometimes trigger memories of her former partner. Her past relationship has not caused problems for her current ones, only the occasional, unpleasant memory. This fairly smooth transition into a new relationship is further illustration of her overall transition from a violent relationship to a nonviolent one as she moves forward with few lingering concerns.

Layla also expressed a smooth transition between relationships. Her new relationship started so well that she was able to leave the old romance behind with little distress.
Layla: The new person that I met, I felt like we had something really, really great so it didn’t bother me too much to go into a different direction and a new relationship.

Layla, like many participants, reported missing her former partner as she would anyone she broke up with after a long term relationship. However, this was not related to the violence in the prior relationship. Layla’s transition was smooth, and illustrated by comments such as this.

Participants expressed a range of examples of their Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships. All of them mentioned lingering concerns, many of which were already resolved, and some elaborated on a smooth transition without much distress. These reflections offered insight into the process of transitioning. Participants also talked about Shifting Roles from a partner seeking to manage abuse to a protective parent, a member of a limited friendship with the ex-partner, or someone who has little in common with other survivors of IPV. Almost all saw themselves as people who could now assist survivors in special ways, instead of being in that role.

These data composed the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships category, which is an exploration of information directly addressing the phenomenon that inspired this study. This category was linked to the final results of this process, Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience, by a category dedicated to efforts that demonstrated Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood.
Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood

Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood refers to the actions that interviewees took to initiate and manage the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships. This category was influenced by three other categories: Increases in Risks and Strengths, Microsystemic Conditions, and Macrosystemic Conditions. The end results, or consequences, are captured in the final category in this analysis: Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood contains information on processes of purposeful and goal-oriented behaviors and interactions. These actions and interactions had impact that created change, whether or not it was intentional.

Because this study interviewed people who successfully made this transition, all examples of Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood are recognized as important parts of a forward movement toward the healthy relationship. Some violent relationships lasted longer than others, but this is not taken to mean that some participants were less effective within this category. The analysis of these data recognized these chronological variations as the result of the prior four categories which led to, provided a context for, and heavily influenced agency.

Ann offered a great deal of insight into what it was like to actively create the change necessary for the transition. In this example, Ann emphasized that the respect that should be shown to all survivors of IPV.

*Ann: We shouldn’t forget that... just the very fact that... I’m here today, or that any other person is on the other side of an abusive relationship, is a huge... honor to who you are as a person... to your strength and your ability to survive... That is*
a horribly frightening thing... if what you’re accustomed to is that pattern... to any pattern, to say, “I’m going to change. I’m not going to do it anymore.” That’s a scary thing. And so... I don’t think you should forget, I don’t think you should belittle what you’ve been through because it’s your life.

Ann makes it clear that, regardless of the differences in the types and levels of struggle, those who make the transition exhibit “strength” and the “ability to survive.”

Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood contains three sub-categories. These are: Shifts in Communication to a healthful relationship and about the past relationship; Exceptional Acts during the violent relationship in which the interviewee risked actions that supported their transition process; and healing behaviors during Single-hood.

**Shifts in Communication**

Shifts in Communication occurred in the stories of all participants. These took place when the participant broke the isolation of the violent relationship by talking about it with others. Sometimes it also took the form of declining to discuss the violence in order to emphasize other accomplishments or facets of their life experiences. Throughout every interview it also marked dramatic changes in a participant’s role in establishing their new relational communication patterns, compared to the past.

Every participant engaged in an act of rejecting silent isolation about intimate partner violence by participating in this interview. They also retold moments when they shared some or all of their stories about the past violence with friends, police, courts, later significant others, others with similar backgrounds, and sometimes even the general public. This section only includes disclosures from within the violent relationship and
during single-hood. The cultural taboos and potential for lingering emotions make current disclosers examples of continued agency against the violent relationship. These situations were considered aspects of Macrosystemic Conditions (Culture and Comparisons) and Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships (Later Smoothness and Struggles or Shifting Roles).

Participants placed special emphasis through their words and body language on the role of talking about the abuse while it was occurring and during single-hood. It often took on an added element of risk and effort to create these interactions, leading to the inclusion in this category. In this quote, also included in an earlier section, Ginger shared her decision to stop protecting her ex-partner and seek support for herself.

_Ginger: I didn’t want anyone to hate him... [but] when he cheated on me and he got the girl pregnant, I had had enough. I was so emotionally broken, I had to tell my family. Um, I, I didn’t know what to do. I had to call and confess to my bosses, and I was just so broken._

It was very difficult for Ginger to speak to others about the abusive relationship, because she “didn’t want anyone to hate him.” Her bravery eventually led to a support network that assisted her when the relationship came to an end. The decision to take the risk of speaking signals the change in communication styles about the violence. This also marks it as an act of agency and change that helped her build toward the termination of her relationship.

Marta made sure that her ex-partner knew that his actions were not a secret from the police or her family and friends on multiple occasions. This was a part of her efforts to build a strong support system that assisted her throughout her transition. Marta made
her former partner aware that she told others about his behavior, as noted in this example. He had returned to the home with a phone to replace the one he broke when she tried to call for help.

*Marta:* He came back with a phone from K-mart or some place like that and said, “That was very fucked up and I’m really sorry” and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I said, “I need to make some calls, so it’d be nice if you were busy in another part of the house,” and I can’t remember who, I think I called my sister first.

This moment occurred soon after the first act of violence in Marta’s relationship. She immediately moved to break the isolation that many survivors feel by alerting others to the violence. This served to reinforce the termination of her relationship over time.

MS was aware that there were significant risks involved in sharing her stories of abuse. Although most of her experiences with the legal system have been distressing, there was one police officer with whom she had a more positive experience and she confided in him multiple times. She met him through a friend to whom she disclosed while trying to survive an attack with her child. These interactions led to one of the few times that her ex-partner was put in jail.

*MS:* Well, the police officer was pretty much the only one I could say anything to and it was always describing the actual incidence that had happened right then and there. The one time they actually locked him up, which I was kind of shocked that they even did that, um, he had um grabbed me, pulled my hair, shoved my face in the dirt... I tried to grab the phone and... call 911 and he threw the phone up against the wall and it busted into you know a whole bunch of pieces... There was a struggle and... somehow or another I got those keys back and I did make it
to the car and, and took off out of there... he’s chasing me of course and... I went to a friend’s house and the friend is actually who took me down to meet the police officer... I was saying, “It’s not going to do any good, there’s no point”... My friend was like, “Yeah, but you need to”... I just basically explained to him... what had happened. Each time... I saw him that was pretty much the way our conversations went... He saw the pattern that was happening... I got the feeling that he had kind of dealt with this kind of thing before... I think that... little things that I said would stand out to him more so than somebody that really had no experience, so, but other than that... I didn’t talk to anybody. I wasn’t allowed to talk to anybody and I was really terrified [of what would happen] if I did and he found about it because... it was a small town area anyway and everybody loved him to death.

MS’s description illustrates that risk that many interviewees faced when they considered disclosing the violence to others. For MS, this officer helped her to realize that others might see “the pattern that was happening,” and also reinforced this pattern for herself. Furthermore, it was her disclosure to a friend that made it possible for her to access this officer. Disclosures were often events that required great bravery and risk, but that could also yielded positive results.

Ann created a lasting community of friends and family members that knew about the violence and supported her transition. After leaving her ex-partner, she spent some time single. Her goals changed from reducing the violence to healing. Over time she came to the decision to limit her thoughts and disclosures about the past. This allowed her to resist being “bitter about it.”
Ann: The further I am away from that relationship... the more I am able to see...
how bad it was, but it’s still very important to me that I not be bitter about it. I
think that bitterness is just such a, a horrible... and nonproductive thing to go
through, so I don’t talk very much about the relationship.

When interviewees were at risk of continued violence, and in need of resources or other
assistance, it was sometimes important to carefully risk making disclosures. Ann’s
comments note that, over time, it is sometimes useful to healing process to reduce the
focus on violence after it has ended and healing has progressed to a certain level.

Another type of Shift in Communication appeared during discussions about
changes in how the interviewees spoke with other potential dating partners. Many
participants decided not to date until they met their current partner, while some enjoyed
casual dating and short-term relationships in the interim. These initial relationship
conversations demonstrated a distinct Shift in Communication for those with a Single-
hood phase, which also includes period of casual dating and short-term relationships.

After years of working to manage and reduce the violence with her demanding
and controlling ex-partner, ST demonstrated a Shift in Communication with a man who
expressed interest in her after the end of her relationship. She later married him, but not
right away. First she asserted her need for time and space; then she built a friendship
with him that turned into love.

ST: My husband told me he had feelings from the beginning but... I wasn’t ready
for that... I was just like... “I need my space,” and so it was about a year, a little
over a year before we actually started dating, but it was long enough for me... To
me it was a friendship thing and then we grew, and it grew you, know and I, I loved him.

ST expressed agency in her single-hood by taking as much time for herself as she needed before consenting to date her current partner. By prioritizing her own needs as a single person who had transitioned out of a violent relationship, ST expressed agency during single-hood. She exhibited agency again by consenting to date once she was ready and interested.

When Savanah first met the man who later became her current partner, she was in extreme emotional distress. Her ex-partner had moved but still sought to control her. Addictions had led to several crises and she found herself isolated and hopeless. Her current partner responded to her calls for help and she quickly recognized him as trustworthy. She made a Shift in Communication by disclosing her situation, seeking support, and accepting his caring words. The result was the initiation of a strong friendship that led to her current romance.

Savanah: The first night we got together... we talked until like the sun came up, and I just confessed everything to him, and told him about my everything with [my ex-partner] and he’s like, “I can’t believe that, you know,” and... he accepted me. He was like, “There’s nothing wrong with you. You’re really cool, like, you’re awesome,” and it was just amazing so we were together constantly.

This shift in communication allowed Savanah to share her pain and seek support from a trusted and caring source. This expressed agency in single-hood that quickly led to a transition into her current nonviolent relationship.
Shifting Communication was an essential verbal form of Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood in every interview. Participants expressed this through stories of telling others about the violence, or limiting who they told in order to develop other goals. They also changed their communication styles between relationships, establishing a vital change in the structure of conversations in their later relationships. Shifting Communications weren’t the only way that participants demonstrated Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood, however; there were a wealth of Exceptional Acts that were based in actions in addition to Shifts in Communication.

*Exceptional Acts*

Exceptional Acts, like Shifting Communication, were composed of goal-oriented behaviors that created change. Instead of being what is said to those outside the relationship, or changes in patterns of communication after the termination of the relationship, Exceptional Acts are activities outside the relationship or behaviors that yielded immediate change within the relationship. The exceptions to the usual activities in their violent relationships served as acts of Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood, whether or not they were intended to do so. Exceptional Acts included the participants furthering their education, increasing their social network while with their ex-partner, and securing jobs. One of the most intense Exceptional Acts was frequently the moment when they ended the violent relationship.

Layla emphasized the act of leaving as the largest Exceptional Act in her violent relationship, highlighting the contrast in her behavior that existed across data in this category.
Layla: I took the control away from him which he shouldn’t have had in the first place, but I let him have it, and once I figured out... “This is stupid, why do I keep going back for more.” and the final time I got to my breaking point and at that moment I realized I have to do it, on my terms and not his... Once I did it, once I did things on my terms, I was completely okay with it.

Near the end of her abusive relationship, MS hit a similar “breaking point” to Layla. She also stood up to her ex-partner, with a surprising result.

MS: I can remember toward the end that I just, I don’t know what, what snapped in me, but something did and I just, I figured if he was you know, and I would, I would stand up to him, go ahead you know, hit this little bitty tiny girl, show me how big and bad you are [Laughter]... It was kind of weird because he didn’t hit me when I did that [Laughter].

Layla and MS were surprised when their former partners backed down in response to their exceptional actions. MS noted that it was “kind of weird because he didn’t hit me when I did that.” In these cases their Exceptional Acts quickly moved the relationship toward its termination without triggering additional acts of violence.

When Napoleon confronted his ex-partner with evidence of her affair it led to a bloody attack. This was an Exceptional Act because he defended his right to equal expectations for fidelity and privacy in the midst of a relationship in which his ex-partner held most of the control. Although he did not anticipate it, his action also triggered a series of events that led to his transition out of the relationship.

Napoleon: I was like man she’s, she’s cheating on me, you know what I mean, she’s cheating on me. So I was like... that ain’t going to work, so I went into her
phone and every single one of her numbers was just a letter... and I said... “If you’re not going to allow me to have access to your phone then you’re not going to have access to mine, we’ll just keep it at that and see where this relationship goes.”

When Napoleon’s former partner failed to respect his expectation that she need not go through his cell phone, he confronted her again and was brutally attacked. This was another Exceptional Act, as he would have normally sought to reduce the risk of physical violence.

Exceptional Acts spanned a range of actions that were exceptions to the typical activities within the violent relationship. While participants showed agency through many day-to-day decisions and behaviors, these powerful moments of agency were particularly emphasized in their stories. These acts combined with Shifts in Communication and Single-hood to form the category of Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood.

Single-hood

Many of the participants spent a period of time single or dating casually between relationships. Only one interview mentioned an interim long-term relationship; it was also nonviolent. Although Shifts in Communication and Exceptional Acts occurred while participants were single, Single-hood has its own sub-category due to the separate nature of actions during this period of time. Because this was a period of intense questioning, healing, exploration and celebration for participants, the acts of Agency that occurred here had a different tone and a unique purpose. Several participants noted that this period was an especially beneficial part of their transition.
Marta enjoyed growing, healing and exploring during her Single-hood. While she was single she spent time laughing and exploring with many lovers and friends. One special memory involved a realization inspired by ice cream. It served to emphasize her hard-won ability to make basic decisions on her own, and supported her transition away from controlling violence.

*Marta: I had this hysterical moment after he moved out that, that I’m sure every, every survivor comes to in... his or her way, but I went to the store to get ice cream and I was going down the aisle and... I said, “I can get any kind of ice cream that I want...” And she’s like, “Well, of course you can.” And I said, “No, no you don’t understand [Laughter]. It’s like it always had to be, even if all we had was five bucks, you know, it had to be either this or that.” And she was like, “No shit.” And I said, “Yeah.” And she was like, “Well what’d you bring?” [Laughter]*

Ann had a similar experience over ice cream after leaving her ex-partner. It was one of many times during her Single-hood in which she did things that could not happen while she was with her ex-partner, things that further solidified her decision to leave her ex-partner.

*Ann: It was my first night [in my new apartment] and there was a little grocery store down on the street and I thought, “I want some ice cream,” and it was eight o’clock and I walked out the door and I said, “I don’t have to tell anybody, I don’t have to ask anybody, I’m going to go get ice cream!”... There were... that whole period [of many years]... [there were] so many moments like that.*
The act of purchasing their choice of ice cream when they wanted became a way to explore and celebrate their transition from a violent relationship into single-hood. As such, it was an important part of their healing process, and echoed many moments when participants steadily stepped further and further away from the control that their former partners had exercised over them.

Alexis took the opportunity to relocate while she was single and considering committing to her current partner. Not only did she leave behind her ex-partner and the stalker that attacked her, she enjoyed the ability to develop independence she had never had before.

*Alexis: Being able to move [many] miles away... and being able to really, for the first time, really truly think for myself and make my own decisions, which is sad to say because I was [20-something] years old, but... It really, really was a good thing for me you know?*

For Alexis, the opportunity to move became an invaluable aspect of her Single-hood. Not only did it allow her to live closer to her current partner, it also offered her the opportunity to heal further and obtain a better education.

Alexis was not the only one who benefited from time in a new area of the world. After a year during which she felt depressed and continued to struggle with the decision to leave her ex-partner, Sasha took an opportunity to spend time in Europe. It was her first time living outside the South and the new culture inspired her to develop new ideas about dating, a zest for independence and two friendships that she continues to cherish.

*Sasha: Afterwards... I decided to study abroad and go to [Europe] and... just get away from everything... because... I did feel like a failure... I would honestly
consider me very depressed and I didn’t really go out and… different things, um but you know, by the second year when I went to [Europe] and… met some new people and [experienced] new way of life and new way of living… Here it’s a taboo, but basically no one in [there] gets married… So I went there not knowing anyone and I left having two of my best friends that I have now, so it was a good change.

Sasha’s move allowed her to continue her education in an environment where she could heal within a culture that supported her Single-hood and prized friendship among peers and lovers. Her single-hood was an important time of healing during which she exhibited the agency necessary to make this beneficial trip.

Like Alexis, Sara moved at the end of her relationship. It was an exciting time for her, during which she reestablished herself, made new friends, attended parties, and met her current partner.

Sara: It was a very cathartic time when I was coming back here and um I just started going to these parties, it just so happened that I… moved in with my [family member] and… this woman lived about… three miles away… and she [had] this… idea to throw parties for gay women, so it was… great… I met [my partner] at one of those parties, and we just started dating… It’s really great.

For Sara, the end of her relationship coincided with her relocation, all of which stemmed from an act of agency that initiated the move. Sara used her Single-hood to explore, celebrate, and meet her current partner.

Single-hood played an important role for many participants. Those who spent time single noted it as an essential period of recovery, excitement, difficult healing, and
solidifying the transition out of violence. It combined with Shifts in Communication and
Exceptional Acts to form the category of Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-
hood. This category contained behaviors directed at the goal of accomplishing the
transition process, whether or not the participants knew the action would do so. In the
context of the violent relationship, these behaviors often came at a heavy price, ranging
from increased risk to brutal violence. During Single-hood they were sometimes difficult
accomplishments and sometimes enjoyable, but ultimately they all brought positive
results.

Actions within the nonviolent relationship were not considered examples of
Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood. Instead of preparing to leave,
leaving, or recovering in single-hood, these examples occurred within a context of
nonviolent relationship building. This significant difference transformed them into
Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.

*Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience*

The final category within the grounded theory developed from this study is
Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. It contains illustrators of
resilience at both levels from every interview. Participants offered a great deal of
information within this category that occurred in a multitude of ways throughout their
stories. This category contains the consequences of the primary phenomenon at the heart
of this study, Transition from Violence to Nonviolent Relationships.

These results of the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships formed
three sub-categories. Many of the participants reflected on ways in which they eventually
benefited from the violent relationship and pointed to an ability to utilize aspects of the
harmful experience in new, useful ways. These statements expressed a belief that the former relationship sometimes Makes You Stronger. More frequently, interviews contained descriptions that were oriented toward the Present and Future. Finally, participants spoke at length about the ways in which they worked together to create and maintain a strong relationship with their Partners in the face of any lingering concerns specific to the experience of a prior violent relationship. All of these joined together to provide insight into how participants experienced Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.

Makes you Stronger

Some participants said that, in the long run, there were some benefits to having experienced a violent relationship. Examples of this were included previously, as participants expressed a sense of special knowledge that could be used to help others in the Shifting Roles sub-category within the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships. Other examples were related to wisdom regarding choosing partners, new abilities, increased appreciation for nonviolent significant others, and hope for the ability to develop positive future relationships.

MS verbalized a range of ways in which she has incorporated positive aspects of her experiences in the prior relationship. She also shared an appreciation (that was expressed by all parents in this study) for the children that were born in the prior relationship.

MS: I realized, hey, you got... amazing, beautiful children out of this. You are a much stronger person. You now understand what goes on with women in those situations and you didn’t have that knowledge before. You can recognize it from a
mile away; you didn’t have that knowledge before. You know that’s going to be very important in my future... to be able to support a woman who might be in that situation.

MS expressed resilience through her recognition of important wisdom that stemmed from her transition. She was also filled with gratitude for her children, a wonderful benefit that she brought forward from her violent past. Her ability to recognize that positive events and learning could come from such negative experiences is a sign of resilience in the later part of the transition process.

Marta stated that she can now tap into her lingering anger in order to protect herself if she needs to. Her profession sometimes puts her in physically risky situations, but she does not fear being attacked because of the power of her rage.

Marta: I pity any fool, any fool who grabs me thinking that I am going to be compliant because that’s when, that’s when all that rage becomes useful.

While MS exhibited resilience with her ability to find positive outcomes that were created from her negative experiences, Marta demonstrates resilience by using a distressing emotion for appropriate, protective strength. Marta finds comfort in this new use for her rage, allowing her to use it to contribute to her resilience after her transition out of a violent relationship.

Alexis regrets her former relationship in some ways, but she has also come to the conclusion that she has a better romance now because of her past. Her past experiences gave her a greater appreciation for men like her current partner.

Alexis: I do and I don’t regret it, you know. I mean I do regret it because that was the worst year... It was horrible and a lot of pain... on all levels... but I don’t
regret it because I think... every experience in life is a learning experience, and I fully believe that if I had not had to go through that horrible situation then I probably wouldn’t even be able to appreciate the person that I’m with now as much as I do... I’d had that type of person in the past as well, but I didn’t appreciate it because I’d never had the bad before... I didn’t know that not everyone is good... it’s a... learning process and I think it helps me to fully appreciate what I have now.

Alexis shows resilience by simultaneously recognizing that the violent relationship was “horrible and a lot of pain,” while also utilizing the experience to build a successful relationship in which she has a new-found appreciation for men like her current partner.

Layla also drew inspiration from the good parts of her past relationship. It gave her hope that she can have that level of intimacy with a nonviolent partner.

*Layla: It makes me hopeful that I can be close to other men... in my life and hopefully... they won’t feel the same way that he felt about me.*

Like Alexis, Layla recognizes that the past relationship was violent while also gleaning a positive consequence. This useful aspect of the past violent relationship contributes to her psychosocial resilience with her current partner.

Many participants shared ways in which they had come to value positive aspects of the past relationship, or skills gained from those experiences. These statements reflected their individual resilience, because they were able to incorporate some aspects from the past in useful ways. At the same time, they did this without being controlled by any lingering, negative impact. This left them free to focus on the Present and Future.
**Present and Future**

Participants smiled, laughed and “glow[ed]” while talking about their current relationships. They shared a sense of confidence in the Present and Future that was not mentioned when talking about the violence in the past. Expressions of joy and happiness with their relationships, as they currently are, were prevalent. They also looked forward to the ways in which their stories might reach others through this research project, and offered several suggestions. While these participants did express quite a few lingering concerns, many of which were already addressed, the interviewees were clearly not hindered by them when it came to the Present and Future of their relationships.

Ann’s experience with violence was long and extremely difficult, yet she has co-created a new relationship that is strikingly loving and mutually supportive. When she was asked about qualities in herself that she relies on, she responded with joy and hope for the future.

*Ann: You have this underlying hope that things are going to work out... and that... as a person I’m going to grow in this relationship and so when little things do come up... it’s not the big deal that it was at one time in my life because there is that underlying hope that it’s going to work and all you have to do is talk through it or... take the steps necessary to not harbor it all inside, but to um to just talk it out and it will work out... I’m a really happy person. I think I’m the happiest person I know. [Laughter]*

Ann demonstrates psychosocial resilience through her ability to be happy and hopeful in her current relationship, feelings which were uncommon in the past. These positive feelings co-exist, or perhaps help to counter, some lingering negative consequences of the
past violence. Those consequences are unable to stop her from being “the happiest
person” she knows.

Ginger smiled, lowered her eyes, and hugged herself happily when asked what it
was like to be in her new relationship.

Ginger: Amazing. That’s the only word I can think of, amazing. Just, I mean,
amazing. [Laughter]

MS beamed as she sat forward and spoke with her hands for further emphasis when
talking about her current partner.

MS: He is absolutely amazing. We are um we are both very, very happy. I love him
to death. He is just so supportive… I know this is going to sound corny, but it’s
almost like… we were made for each other. I was made for him or he was made
for me or something... We meet in the middle on everything... we share so many of
the same values... and beliefs and... we want the same things and... he’s very
supportive of me… We recognize that... we have something different... I still feel
the same as the... first day we ever went out together, the first day we touched… I
mean it’s like how is this that [this many] years down the road we still feel the
same as we felt the first you know the moment.

For Ginger, MS and all of the other participants, their past experiences have not limited
their ability to be happy now. They demonstrate resilience in the form of ready smiles,
body language full of gratitude and pride, and words that express the hope and happiness
they now experience.

Statements like these filled the interviews. The Present and Future focus of
participants included many expressions of confidence in the future and joy in their
current relationships. These further demonstrated their resilience to lingering consequences from their prior relationships; these participants even expressed an increased ability to find happiness with their current partners. As MS demonstrated in the statement above, many of these illustrations corresponded with Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience based on their interactions with their partners.

**Partners**

Participants in this study were active in every aspect of their transition, but something special happened when their strengths combined with those of their partners. Every interviewee offered extensive information on the ways in which they interacted with their partners in order to create and maintain a mutually enjoyable, nonviolent, long-term relationship. Sometimes the two had so much in common that they seemed to combine into a single entity to tackle tasks and concerns. Other times they spoke about the way the couple benefited from the integration and balance of each partner’s unique traits. Through it all, they expressed high levels of trust, honesty and dedication to thriving as a team.

Napoleon was one of many participants who were proud of the active sex life in their relationships. Several took leadership positions in this role, making the most of their sexual desire. In Napoleon’s relationship, though, he has a partner with a perfectly matched libido, right down to their shared preference for well-endowed women. This was one of several instances in which Napoleon talked about how he and his partner had so much in common that they sometimes formed a meshed unit.

*Napoleon D: Looking at chicks together... That’s sick, ain’t it? Goodness gracious... We have the same [tastes], it’s amazing how I can meet a female who,*
who can enjoy me in every way possible and then turn around and have the same desire for the same thing I like, you know what I mean, like we both like big butts, you know what I mean. It don’t matter… But besides that sexual aspect of it...

we’re on the same page about everything.

Napoleon and his partner combine their passion, common “desire[s]” in both sexual and platonic areas, to be “on the same page about everything.” His example shows the special effect of a positive relationship in which the two create a mutually enjoyable team. His ability to co-create such a situation is a strong demonstration of his psychosocial resilience.

Ginger’s relationship is also very sexually passionate, but her illustration was based on their ability to work through problems. Like Napoleon, they are sometimes so close they seem to meld together to succeed.

Ginger: I mean we just are, we’re just on the same page in our life, and it’s so rare to me. I feel like I can’t imagine being this in tune with someone ever. I’m so thankful.

Ginger was able to form a close team with her current partner, a signal of relational resilience after her transition out of a violent relationship and into a nonviolent one.

It was somewhat more common for participants to express ways in which they and their partners were different and balanced each other well. They expressed resilience by tackling concerns as a strong team consisting of two distinct individuals. Savanah and Sara summarized this concisely.

Savanah: His weaknesses are my strengths and his strengths are my weaknesses.

It’s very like full circle about us.
Sara: We complement each other... because I am... silly and funny and ridiculous or I like to have fun and stuff and... she can be a little too serious, sometimes.

Sara and Savanah provide an example of the kind of balanced, complimentary teamwork that most participants expressed. The combination of their unique qualities with that of their partners created a special type of intimacy and bond. This demonstrates relational resilience through the use of previously under-utilized traits that allow the relationship to deepen and increase in stability.

Every participant offered descriptions of ways in which they co-created intimacy: mutual trust, honesty and a shared drive to talk and work through problems. This element of intimacy was further evidence of the relational resilience shared by these interviewees with their current significant others. Sasha offered this example in which she depends on her current partner to offer honest, constructive criticism when no one else will. Prior to this statement she was asked about qualities in her relationship that she relies on.

Sasha: Stability’s a good one. Trust and honesty. I rely on all of those um because I have friends where I think he’s the only one that would give me... honest criticism... and feels comfortable about giving me criticism, especially things I do wrong and... it’s just good to hear his opinion.

Sasha is able to seek “honest criticism” from her current partner, because they have a nonviolent relationship in which she can safely rely on his feedback. Her past experiences have not reduced her ability to appreciate and utilize this aspect of the couple, demonstrating relational resilience.
ST and her current husband are proud to share a focus on parenting. It is the source of a great deal of their communication and emotional intimacy, and offers them a satisfying way to grow together.

*ST:* We get along and... we have the occasional card we send back and forth or, but we don’t sit there and have... long conversation... We’re just so used to having our kids with us and I know Dr. Phil tells you [that] you need to have that time away... [Laughter] I love Dr. Phil, most the time, but that’s how what we just [work], we don’t do that because we’re fine. It’s working. Like he says, it’s working.

ST and her husband demonstrate shared relational resilience in this ability to develop intimacy through parenting their children together. They have developed enjoyable ways of showing their care, like through “the occasional card” but moreover, their unity in parenting is “working” for them.

Ann and her current partner have been living together for about a year. During that time they have worked together to overcome a list of relationship stresses, many unrelated to her past relationship. She shared that it is their deep friendship that allows them to work things out and face the future as a loving team, a bond that many other participants implied during their interviews. Here, she responded to a question about her favorite things about her current relationship.

*Ann:* The safety. I mean when I look back on this year together, I moved in [about a year ago]... the house has been a total wreck, we’ve remodeled everything in the house [since I got here]. I started a new job, I got laid off from my old one, moved in... he’s had several things and there’s whole litany of, of things to put
stress on a relationship. There have been those times yes when it's been a little bit edgy... but that's it. It's that they are moments... and they're over and it's, more than anything else... just this deep friendship. I, I think... that one word is, is the most important aspect... Just that safe, safe friendship.

In spite of a considerable list of relationship stressors, Ann and her current partner have shown relational resilience by growing increasingly intimate. This has resulted in a “deep friendship,” an important signifier of emotional intimacy in a resilient relationship.

Participants stressed long lists of Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. Examples with Partners offered illustrations of various forms of teamwork, the ability to face stressors successfully, and sexual passion. Interviewees were most often focused on the Present and Future, but also recognized that wisdom and power gained from the past relationship sometimes Make You Stronger. Participants demonstrated that they, and their current relationships, were not controlled or limited by past trauma. They have been able to move forward in healthy ways, individually and as a couple, including the incorporation of positive aspects of the prior violence. They now focus on their current relationships and goals, and look forward to a happy future. These three sub-categories formed Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience. This category completes the grounded theory exploring the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), who are now in later, non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship. This population has
been indirectly explored in existing research and outreach publications, but little direct work has been done in this area. In order to understand this process, it was necessary to gain an understanding of how participants made the transition from violent to nonviolent relationships, resulting in expressions of individual and survivor-couple resilience. Participants engaged in demonstrations of agency in preparation for the termination of the relationship, during the termination itself, and throughout any time spent in single-hood. These actions and behaviors were impacted by three factors. Increases in strengths and risks provided a context for their agency while also necessitating the transition in the first place. Microsystemic conditions influenced their change-oriented acts through alterations in the context of their most intimate interpersonal relationship and other direct interactions. Macrosystemic conditions, such as culture, passage of time, personal histories and external events also had a significant impact.

The presentation of the results began with the causal conditions: Increases in Risks and Strengths. Information in this category revealed the participants were motivated to make a transition, often years before they were able to leave, by factors such as key changes in the abuse, changes in the context of their relationship, and new awareness and motivators. All participants experienced these phenomena, which directly led to the initiation of the transition process. The transition was a complex process, even for those who experienced it relatively quickly. These factors continued to influence the process after it began. Mounting risks had to be met with increased strengths, including resources, in order for the participant to succeed in leaving the relationship and progressing through later aspects of the transition. All of the participants in this study
actively ended their relationships, nearly always to the surprise of the violent significant other.

Microsystemic Conditions also influenced the transition process. The context of the abusive relationship and the abuser’s own actions created the initial microsystemic conditions, while the final context was composed of the nonviolent partner and that later relationship. Important others also influenced this process by offering or withholding their support. Unsupportive others took a limited range of forms, and were often members of the legal system, family, friends, or fellow religious members. Supportive others took a wide span of incarnations, including strangers, books, God, friends, family members, and eventually the initial encounters with the new partner. All participants were influenced by these microsystemic interactions throughout the process. Participants often related the chronology of their transition to micro- and macrosystemic conditions.

Macrosystemic Conditions consisted of broad, general interactions with nonspecific others such as organizations. The histories of both partners from before they met the interviewee were also included. Both types of partners had often experienced prior hardships, including violence, as children or adults. However, violent partners based their own inappropriate behavior on that past, while nonviolent partners used their history as a foundation for shared understanding and dedication to building a healthy relationship. This foreshadowed revelations from participants about how many utilized their own experience with IPV as a source of essential knowledge for assisting others. Cultural assumptions and the participant’s own comparisons of the current relationship with others played a role for many. Some interviewees noted that they were keenly aware of stereotypes about their gender and about survivors of IPV. Finally, this category was
rounded out with external negative events. These added stresses to the transition process were not related to either relationship, and often slowed the transition or made it more difficult.

These three categories combined to influence participants’ acts of agency in preparation for termination, termination of the relationship, and single-hood that began with the central phenomenon of this study: the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships. This transition was illustrated by statements of differentiation and comparison, shifting roles, and later smoothness and struggles after the end of the violent relationships. All participants offered information on these facets. Details on differentiation and comparison highlighted the positive attributes of the new partner and relationship by comparing them to the violent partner and relationship. Interviewees made these comparisons in the interview, and also repeated conversations containing these remarks within their current relationship. When a couple failed to differentiate and remarked on a supposed similarity, it led to an emotionally intense conflict that was resolved by emphatic, favorable comparisons that highlighted the differences. Shifting roles were highlighted when participants disclosed a change from the typical role within the abused relationship of a partner seeking to manage and minimize violence to something else. These new roles included a friend of the former abuser, a protective parent drawing violence away from children onto themselves, and a sense of being different from other survivors of IPV.

Agency in Preparation, Termination and Single-hood spanned the distance from the initiation of the Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship to the current Expressions of Individual and Survivor-couple Resilience. These factors existed within
the context of the Increase in Risks and Strengths and the Microsystemic and Macrosystemic Conditions. Information in this category was composed of shifts in communication, exceptional acts and experiences during single-hood. All participants expressed these acts of agency, behaviors which were targeted (knowingly or not) at the goal of making the transition.

The final category consisted of Expressions of Individual and Survivor-couple Resilience. This was a culmination of all other interactions, and was the period in which all participants were currently engaged. Every interviewee displayed joyful body language and expressed a great deal of happiness, love, and confidence for the future in her or his current relationship. Some noted that they felt there were ways in which an experience such as past violence can make you stronger through specialized wisdom, cherished children, and even the power of rage. Participants were more likely, however, to maintain a focus on the present and future. This category often involved examples of how they approach and resolve problems as a team along with their strong communication styles. Most praised the role of sexuality in their current relationship, and many considered themselves the sexual leaders in their relationship or evenly matched with a very passionate partner. These statements combined to paint a picture of the ways in which interviewees demonstrated individual resilience, and enjoyed a range of relational resilience within the survivor-couple.

The complex process within these six categories is reflected in the substantive theory developed from this grounded theory study of the transition from violent to nonviolent relationships. All of the participants had successfully engaged in this transition and were experiencing and expressing the desirable consequence of individual
and relational resilience. Participants varied in the length of time spent in the violent relationship and in the current relationship, as well as in the duration and details of the transition process between them. In spite of these variations, they shared the common process through which they were all able to develop and maintain a mutually enjoyable, committed relationship. The information gathered from these interviews also offers insights to others who are striving to make this transition, their loved ones, outreach workers in this area, and those who seek information on others who have also succeeded in this process. This study also offers an essential expansion of the literature on IPV, feminist outreach efforts, and relational resilience.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of survivors of previous Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), who are now in later non-violent relationships, on the ways in which they co-create and maintain a committed relationship. In order to facilitate this exploration, the following research questions were raised:

1.) What do IPV survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths?
2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships?
3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationship?

These questions were explored by gathering and analyzing data collected through interviews with members of eleven mature, committed IPV survivor-couples. The application of Grounded Theory utilized the demographic and interview data to explore how these survivors were able to co-create and maintain relationships in the face of any lingering negative impact from their prior, violent relationship.

The analysis of these data revealed a substantive Grounded Theory composed of six key categories. Although many factors differed between participants, including the circumstances of the previous violence, resources available and demographics, all of them experienced the process illustrated by this new theory. The discovery of shared themes may offer guidance to both professionals and laypersons invested in the success
of survivors and their later relationships. By adding a new dimension to the existing literature, this research has expanded what is known about IPV, survivors, their later nonviolent partners and the relationships with those partners.

This chapter will briefly review the findings from the previous chapter (Chapter 4), including the illustration of the new Grounded Theory. It will then explore the three research questions in light of the theoretical findings. Each research question will also be accompanied with a discussion of the possible applications for outreach workers, their clients and others interested in this area. Finally, suggestions will be made for future efforts within this area of research.

*Summary of the Findings*

**Figure 5.1. Process Theory for Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship**
This grounded theory study developed a substantive theory focused on the process of the transition from violent to nonviolent relationships. This is illustrated in the above figure 5.1, Process Theory for Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationship, based on the work of Strauss & Corbin (1990). This theory illustrates that the “Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships” is both initiated and influenced by continuing experiences of “Increases in Risks and Strengths.” “Increases in Risks and Strengths” combines with “Microsystemic Conditions” and “Macrosystemic Conditions” to impact and influence “Agency in Preparation, Termination, and Single-hood.” This “Agency in Preparation, Termination, and Single-hood” represents the goal-oriented changes that span between the initiation of the transition to the current “Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.” All of this occurs across varying periods of time, noted as the Chronology line.

Comparisons and Contrasts within the Literature

A review of relevant literature was presented in this paper’s second chapter, to present a foundation for this study. It included sections on: the lack of long-term psychosocial research on IPV survivors or the potential benefits of later nonviolent romantic relationships; IPV-related definitions and statistics, as well as information regarding prevalence, long-term psychosocial impacts, and feminist contributions to the field of study; the individual and relational aspects of resilience studies; relevant strengths-based literature; feminist outreach and qualitative literature related to IPV; and an overview of limited illustrations of long-term relational resilience in possible survivor-couples. In this section, I will place the analysis of the data from this study within the context of the existing literature from chapter two.
Literature on long-term consequences. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is a general lack of literature focusing specifically on the topic of resilience (individual or relational) in survivors of prior IPV. This is not surprising, since even the presence and impact of long-term negative psychosocial effects stemming from IPV has not been well-explored by researchers (Bogat, Levendosky, Theran, Von Eye & Davidson, 2003; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000, Waldrop & Resick, 2004). There is a great deal of literature, however, on other aspects of domestic violence and on resilience that can offer important insights for this study. Much of the available literature does not focus on members of current nonviolent relationships. Therefore, the results of this study should not be interpreted as contradicting the previous literature when different findings arise. It is simply an addition to the research-based knowledge in this area, which addresses the topic from the perspective of members of survivor-couples who have experienced prior IPV.

Literature on Intimate Partner Violence.

Participants in this study had experienced a wide range of forms of IPV in their prior relationships. Their abusive ex-partners were male and female, and the relationships spanned from dating to cohabitation and committed life-partnerships. For some participants, the violence ended when the relationship did; others continued to be the subject of their former partner’s violent efforts after the termination of the relationship. This range of experiences and contexts is true to the definitions of IPV in the literature. Intimate partner violence can be defined as “violence committed by a spouse, ex-spouse, or current or former boyfriend or girlfriend” (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003, p.3). According to the Power and Control Wheel
introduced by Pence & Paymar (1993), IPV can take a vast array of forms in addition to battering. These may be conceptualized as constituting the following categories: coercion and threats; intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing, denying and blaming; using children; male privilege; and economic abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993). This is consistent with Maturana’s definition of violence, the “attempt to impose one’s will upon another” (1986, as summarized in Sanders & Tomm, 1989, p.350).

Nine out of the eleven participants were women who experienced IPV from a former male partner; the other two have abusive ex-partners that were women. Although IPV occurs without regard to gender or sexuality, it is most commonly and most intensely inflicted upon women by men (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). One of the two female abusers in this study, however, raised serious lethality concerns in the survivor’s peer group, demonstrating that IPV perpetrated by women can also be severe in its magnitude.

IPV victimization yields severe and extensive impacts at both the societal and individual levels (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) and the psychological effects have been well-documented (see Campbell & Soeken 1999; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Brady, 1997; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995). The link between mental health concerns and abuse survival supports the potential for these experiences to negatively affect future relationships (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002;
Golding, 1999). Ten of the participants in this study identified as women and so, according to the research, were at additional risk of experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after IPV (Brady 1997). It has been found that those suffering from PTSD are less likely to be involved in a relationship (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995).

Despite these risk factors, however, this study was based on interviews with eleven participants who were able to successful navigate these concerns, when they occurred, in order to develop long-term, nonviolent relationships. Every participant in this study emphasized their happiness in the current relationship and offered examples of the mutual appreciation that both partners had for the relationship and each other. Although much of the literature strongly suggests that IPV survivor-couples are unlikely to exist, this study has demonstrated that they, in fact, are both possible and appear to thrive. In further contrast to prior research on the likelihood of experiencing repeated abusive relationships (Smith & White, 2003), none of these participants reported more than one violent intimate relationship during their lives. This supports the statement by Waldrop & Resick that “…some manage to survive and emerge from abusive relationships with fewer negative outcomes than others” (2004, p. 291).

Literature on Resilience Studies and the Strengths-Based Approach.

A large number of female domestic violence victims terminate the violent relationship, as explored in Chapter 2 (Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Weintraub, 2005; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Walker, 1980; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns & Shortt, 1996; Taylor, 2002; Zink, Jacobson, Pabst, Regan & Fisher, 2006), and there is no reason to assume that male survivors are not also likely to
escape. Some single IPV survivors look forward to establishing future relationships and believe that they have gained skills and information that will help them to make better relationship choices in the future (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002). In spite of the findings reviewed above, some research has found that survivors often engage in enjoyable and mutually beneficial new intimate relationships without re-victimization (Dugan & Hock, 2006; Weiss, 2004).

As per the requirements of this study, all interviewees had successfully escaped prior IPV and established later, committed, nonviolent relationships. Their stories reveal that these relationships are not just nonviolent, they are also highly mutually enjoyable, stable, and “thriving.” Most of these participants described experiencing symptoms that are commonly associated with PTSD, and some still experienced nightmares or other negative consequences. It was common for interviewees to state that these concerns had decreased with the passage of time, as well as support from their current partner and other loved ones. However, these distressing consequences (past and present) did not impede participants from healing and finding psychosocial success with new partners. It is particularly worth noting that a number of these relationships seemed to be composed of two members who had both survived varying levels of prior IPV. This supports the conclusion that these survivors were not “damaged” or “ruined,” but rather entered the relationship with both struggles and specific tools that promoted thriving in individual and relational contexts.

This study found that interviewees experienced a six-part, nonlinear process of transition that led to illustrations of individual and relational resilience. This process
included the experiences of violence, lingering negative (and positive) consequences, and expressions of the ability to thrive. This is consistent with the definition of resilience.

Resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity. Implicit within this notion are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process. (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)

In order to study resilience, it is necessary to reject the deficit- and pathology-based focus that is commonly used in research and replace it with a more open exploration of the impact of stressors and traumatic events (Benard, 2006; Weiss, 2005). Doing so allows studies such as this to gain an understanding of how and why some people are able to thrive in spite of past traumas (Walsh, 1998, 2006). Use of the concept of resilience also allowed this study to challenge the assumption that IPV is so damaging that survivors are permanently damaged and impaired (Rutter, 1994).

Consistent with Walsh’s (2006) assertions, these participants demonstrated an “active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge” (p.4). Indeed, not only did the participants do so, but their relationships did as well. The data show that these survivor-couples were able to use relational resilience to thrive in the face of any lingering negative consequences. The data for this study agree with previous studies that have found that resilient individuals create “inner resources” (Davis, 2002, p. 1248) during the traumatic experience, and extends this finding by suggesting that these resources can also enhance later relationships. Although resilience research has most commonly focused on individuals (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000),
it is possible to expand this approach to adults and their later intimate relationships (Walsh, personal communication, December 3, 2007; Connolly, 2005). This study explores and supports the value of further exploration into the area of relational resilience, as demonstrated by survivor-couples.

This study combined resilience studies with the strengths-based approach from social work and Couple and Family Therapy, as espoused by theorists such as Saleebey (see 1996, 2001, 2002), in order to avoid a pathology-focused approach. Saleebey (2002) asserts that those who have experienced IPV, and other types of trauma, can not be presumed to lack the ability and desire to continue to contribute to their communities and relationships. Indeed, nearly all of the participants expressed a desire to help others who struggle with IPV, and some have held outreach and prevention positions. They also cited many important contributions to their relationship, stemming from sources such as personality traits and wisdom gained from their transition process. This supports resilience-based research, which shows that traumatic experiences can lead to increased strength and resourcefulness (Walsh, 2003). The work of Saleebey (1996, 2001, 2002) provided guidance toward the creation of the interview guide used in this study, in order to create a strengths-based approach to data collection and analysis. This combination resulted in a study with the potential to address the gap in the existing IPV and feminist outreach literature.

Feminist and Outreach Literature.

This section reviews the main themes of the feminist and outreach literature reviewed in chapter two. Both the feminist and general IPV outreach literature focus on prevention efforts, the period of on-going abuse, and the termination of the relationship
while abstaining from addressing long-term well-being (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Crowell & Burgess, 1996). There is a lack of longitudinal studies on IPV survivors (Campbell & Soeken, 1999); later (post-crisis) psychosocial well-being, and relational resilience are rarely addressed (see Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Smith, 2003). These works of IPV research have been a necessary part of essential awareness-raising efforts and have brought domestic violence into the public consciousness and impacted policy and treatment efforts in necessary ways. Existing outreach texts in this area (see NiCarthy, 1986, 1987, 2004), however, make little mention of the potential to engage in later nonviolent relationships, nor the possibility of gaining additional healing and well-being within the context of those new relationships. This focus upon the immediate consequences of IPV in research ignores one of the important facets of the process of surviving and healing from such violence.

This study expands upon the literature in important ways by exploring these areas through interviews with members of survivor-couples that have experienced prior IPV. Participants had terminated their prior relationship at least a year ago, some over a dozen years ago, thereby offering data from the neglected population of survivors of IPV that occurred one or more years ago. This study also included both individual and relational questions, all of which used a strengths-based approach in order to explore the process of resilience. It is no surprise the resulting data differed from much of the existing literature.

At the same time, participants consistently spoke at length about the violent relationship and the process of terminating that relationship, as well as the positive aspects of the nonviolent relationship. However, they often struggled or paused to
consider when asked to detail their own acts of agency, positive traits, and similar strengths-related information. Although only one interview question directly requested the participant’s stories of experiencing IPV, this question was often answered in the greatest detail and for the longest period of time. In contrast, questions requesting general positive qualities and contributions of the interviewees yielded the briefest answers and were often met with reluctance and requests for clarification. Therefore, later research in this area may seek to further encourage and develop these aspects of their histories and experiences. This may be possible through multiple interviews, the presence of participant-chosen supportive others during the interview, or altered interview questions. It seems likely that this is a concern rooted in cultural concepts of surviving IPV; there is great emphasis on survivors’ experiences of violence and victimhood than agency and strength. Indeed, several participants noted that they not previously considered many of the strengths-focused questions from the interview although all had considered the deficit-focused side of their stories.

Participants in this study noted that they felt fundamentally different from other IPV survivors, especially those seeking targeted services. Only one referred to herself using the term “survivor” and it was in the phrase “survivor-slash-thriver.” While the term survivor is common in the literature, especially the feminist literature, it is important to realize that participants in this study did not seem to identify with the term. Are other terms available, or is it inappropriate to label all survivors of IPV with that identity? Perhaps the emphasis should placed on the experiences of prior violence, and not on the identity of having survived them. Similarly, current outreach efforts may benefit from a multi-tiered approach that includes support and awareness for both those who are in crisis
as well as those who are thriving. The participants in this study often participated in hopes of helping others, and may benefit from additional opportunities to do so by offering hope and mentorship to survivors who are struggling to achieve a positive transition process. Studies with members of survivor-couples can help to provide alternatives to the deficit-based theories, treatments, and forecasts that currently dominate the field of IPV research and outreach (Bonanno, 2004).

Examples of Survivor-couples in the Literature

There are some limited examples of survivor couples in the feminist and outreach literature (see Saunders, 2003; Anderson, 197; NiCarthy, 1987; Weiss, 2000, 2004) that are usually found within interview-based books and articles on other aspects of IPV survival. The fact that such examples exist supports work that states that IPV victimization is a traumatic experience, but also one from which survivors can recover (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002; Rutter, 2004). Studies such as the one carried out in this paper build upon these findings through direct research in the budding area of IPV survivor-couples. This provides an important addition to the reviewed research on the potential for survivors to develop individual well-being after a violent intimate relationship. While single-hood remains a healthy option for IPV survivors, relationships should not be excluded from consideration. Recovery can be further aided by consistently supportive intimate partners who are active in the healing process (Carlson, McNutt, Choi & Rose, 2002; Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002).

Participants in this study echoed some of the existing examples of survivor-literature at times, and contrasted with this literature at other times. NiCarthy (1987)
offered some summaries and direct quotes from IPV survivors who had engaged in later, nonviolent relationships. Although there was little information on these later relationships, it is quite possible that they were examples of survivor-couples. A common theme throughout these interviews, one that also occurred in NiCarthy’s work (1987), was the importance of communication patterns that allowed survivor-couples to work through problems. Participants in the current study noted that their ability to communicate enhanced their teamwork in all efforts, not just those related to negative consequences of the prior violence. Interviewees in this study also echoed prior statements about the calmness of their current relationship (NiCarthy, 1987). One of NiCarthy’s (1987) interviewees noted that her partner helped her to learn to enjoy sexual intimacy again. Some of these participants echoed the same experience, while many stated that they did not suffer from sexual difficulties after the violent relationship and enjoyed initiating and leading in their current love lives.

Summary of Implications for the Literature

Few studies or outreach projects include information on the existence and experiences of IPV survivors who are now in survivor-couples, or on their current partners. However, the data gathered from this study is consistent with what has been published. The information collected here also offers a wealth of new data with potential implications that expand the current literature. Qualitative data such as these can offer a basis for later quantitative studies on the areas that have been explored. Furthermore, it creates an important step within my program of research. As later interviews take place, the findings and conclusions will become more deeply supported and expanded. These
future efforts can begin to address the current gap in both the relational resilience literature, and the feminist and mainstream publications in the field of IPV studies.

**Discussion and Applications**

It was noted in Chapter 2 that survivors of IPV suffer from a range of symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that can make psychosocial tasks more difficult. In fact, individuals experiencing PTSD are less likely to be in a relationship (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995). At the same time, the review of the literature also revealed that “...some manage to survive and emerge from abusive relationships with fewer negative outcomes than others” (Waldrop & Resick, 2004, p. 291). As this research shows, survivors of IPV are able to leave their abusive relationships and establish positive, nonviolent later relationships.

True to the process-based definition of resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), participants experienced a substantial threat as well as great adversity and responded to these difficulties with specific behaviors that yielded success in managing the impact of any negative consequences. These behaviors began within the context of the violent relationship and then were adapted to continue through single-hood. Consistent with at least one study (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002), noted in the literature review, these survivors also credited their current partners with great assistance in attaining greater mental and emotional well-being. The participants in this study gave many examples of the resilience that yielded positive individual and relational results from their transition processes. This information can be useful in addressing the research questions that framed this study.
Three questions formed the initial framework to address the purpose of this study.  
1.) What do IPV survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths?  
2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships?  
and 3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationship?  These questions resulted in the semi-structured interview guide used for this study.  As a result, the data yielded content that can address each of these questions.  

This study demonstrates that the impact of past violent relationships was often utilized in the current relationship for bonding and to create and maintain positive communication techniques.  These communication styles were both verbal and physical, and were applied across all concerns including those not related to the lingering impact of violence.  Participants were proud to contribute to their own relationships as well, and found that they benefited from membership in the couple and that both their partner and relationship benefited from them.  For participants in this study, the experiences of prior violence did not limit or constitute the current identity of the individual or relationship.  

The following sections will address each of the research questions utilizing the five elements of the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1996): language, strengths, resilience, critical factors, and community.  These well defined elements offer a structure for the exploration and application of the many strengths revealed in response to the research questions.  Language may be considered the potential of words to enhance the well-being of an individual, family or community, creating strengths.  The element of strengths is considered to consist of beneficial personal traits that may be inherent or learned through experiences and cultural messages.  Resilience is the ability to thrive in
the face and aftermath of trauma and pain. Critical factors include strengths related to chronology and microsystemic conditions, as defined in the grounded theory that developed from this study. Finally, community consists of strengths gained through macrosystemic conditions, as described in the analysis and grounded theory explored in this paper. (Saleebey, 1996)

What do Intimate Partner Violence Survivors Identify as their Survivor-Couple’s Relational Strengths?

Participants in this study appeared to deeply enjoy talking about their current relationships, including their relational strengths. Saleebey’s (1996) elements of the strengths perspective can be useful in considering how the data apply to this research question. The element of language was apparent as participants shared positive verbal interactions with their partners, and as they offered unsolicited comments on their experience of being interviewed. Participants also discussed the role of the element of strengths through their own positive traits, as well as the positive aspects of cultural messages. Resilience was frequently demonstrated alongside the element of strengths, as participants discussed the ability of themselves and their partners to thrive as a relationship, and how this was accomplished through communication. These elements often overlapped, suggesting the importance of applying them in a holistic fashion.

Verbal Element of the Strength Perspective

Across interviews participants expounded on many ways in which they communicate about problems, ranging from the lingering impact of prior violence to common couple’s concerns. Common themes within these sections of the data included positive aspects of their verbal communication style (especially related to the use of
humor and to positive comparisons and differentiation between couples) and the role of sexuality in the current relationship. This corresponds with Walsh’s definition of resilience as “an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge” (2006, p.4). The ability to consistently develop and apply useful communication styles based on differentiation and comparison seems to be a common response to “crisis and challenge” (Walsh, 2006, p.4) for couples in this study.

These interviewees also shared a sense of confidence in the future of their relationship, often based upon how they communicate and work together to solve problems as a team. At the same time, they also shared many stories of happiness and mutual appreciation. This contradicts predictions in the literature of depression and other stress-related disorders that mirror Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996).

Many interviewees noted the importance of humor, including during stressful incidents linked to the violent relationships that they and/or their partners had left. Humor was used to offer comfort, highlight the positive differences between relationships, and reinforce their success in creating a mutually enjoyable couple. These uses of conversational humor existed within a larger context of happiness and positive verbal exchanges not limited to those past situations. Although it may initially seem counterintuitive, this may suggest the need for further research on the overlap of humor and relational IPV resilience.
Another frequent avenue of communication was sexual intimacy. Most participants described an active and happy sex life, and many of them took a leadership role in this area by regularly initiating pleasurable activities and sexual variety. This was a clear example of the ways in which interviewees described their relationships as normal, happy, and resilient to the impacts of past violence. Research has found that sexual violence within IPV relationships increases the likelihood of PTSD in women (Brady, 1997). Several survivors mentioned unwanted, coerced, or otherwise violent sexual events during the abusive relationship, yet they still noted that they enjoy initiating, exploring, and engaging in sexual activity. It is possible that this past sexual violence did not contribute to long-term negative consequences, or perhaps they were able to negate the impact through the positive sexual experiences and expression. This is yet another area worthy of further research.

The use of positive language (verbal and nonverbal) was apparent throughout the interviews. The strengths were demonstrated through the ways in which they spoke about how they communicated with their partners. It was also reflected in their verbalized hope for the future. These examples of the language element of the strengths perspective may have helped to protect participants from the negative predictions that exist throughout the literature.

Applications. Communication-focused relational strengths can be applied to a host of potential applications, as can the ability to base a couple’s relational identity on aspects other than the impact of lingering violence. While the term survivor-couple may prove useful for research and outreach purposes, it is clear that the relationships it can be applied to do not think of themselves that way. Instead, they are healthful couples that
rise to meet obstacles that include, but are not limited to, the lingering impact of prior violence. The term is used in this paper in order to match the existing literature. Communication can be enhanced by working together to create successful approaches to such lingering concerns; these efforts may even be the source of these foundational communication patterns. However, just like the transition itself, these couples exist within a larger past, present and future context that must be recognized. For the past abusive partners, it seems that violence became a constant source of identity and behavior, in contrast to the partners in the current nonviolent relationships.

Outreach workers may wish to consider the implications of these findings for evaluating the structure of their efforts. While many people benefit from awareness-raising and victim-focused services, these interviews offer information on individuals and couples who operate within a larger context and do not consistently utilize targeted resources marketed to domestic violence survivors. Professionals may wish to consider including specific efforts within a larger package of services that do not require survivor-couples to focus exclusively on the impact of prior violence, while still respecting the importance of those experiences.

*Strengths and Resilience Elements of the Strengths Perspective*

Participants in this study also highlighted themes that apply to the strengths and the resilience elements of the strengths perspective. The data contained many references to individual strengths of survivors that contributed to relational resilience in their current relationships. These stemmed from a variety of sources, including their personalities, healing that occurred during singlehood, and beneficial aspects of the current relationship. These strengths led to examples of resilience, as they discussed how their current
relationships thrive in the face of the lingering trauma of violence as well as unrelated relational struggles.

It seems likely that these participants experienced health benefits from their supportive partners, similar to those found by Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea and Davis (2002). However, it is also important to note that many participants stated that they experienced a great deal of healing during single-hood, before meeting their current partner. It is clear that these participants are not dependent on their partners for their well-being. They also exchange supportive efforts with their partners. The analysis of the data suggests that the prior experiences with violence can become opportunities for increased couple-hood bonding, under the circumstances of their current relationship, a finding not addressed in the literature reviewed for this study. This research question is primarily addressed with information from the final category within the prior chapter: “Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.”

These relational strengths seem to be examples of a co-created form of resilience. The continual efforts within these couples speak to the process, as defined by Walsh (2006).

[Resilience] is an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge. The ability to overcome adversity challenges our culture’s conventional wisdom: that early or severe trauma can’t be undone; that adverse experiences always damage people sooner or later… (Walsh, 2006, p. 4)

This supports the concept of survivor-couples, as intimate units which demonstrate a cooperative, relational resilience in the face of “crisis and challenge[s]” (Walsh, 2006, p. 4). Both the crises and the resilience process are apparent in these data. As previously
discussed, these challenges could be expected to target psychosocial processes, such as intimate relationships. Instead of disrupting the relationships of these participants, however, these often became avenues for increased bonding. This was especially apparent during interviews in which the participant noted that the current or prior partner had experienced prior abuse as an adult or child. Violent partners did not demonstrate the individual resilience that interviewees did, instead using it further to fuel their own violence, according to many participants. In contrast, all interviewees and those current partners with histories of abuse used this background to move toward nonviolence. This supports prior research that states that some individuals “manage to survive and emerge from abusive relationships with fewer negative outcomes than others” (Waldrop & Resick, 2004, p. 291). These new relationships bonded over the united desire to thrive in face of the lingering impact of violence, using it as a catalyst for mutual support, communication, and dedication to future growth.

Some participants clearly voiced what was frequently implied: while the past violence was a very important part of their past with some lingering impact, it did not define their present relationship or themselves as individuals. It seems that these were significant experiences but they did not limit their individual or relational identities. This matches with the strength-based perspective (Saleebey, 2006) and Walsh’s family resilience framework (2006) in which individuals are viewed as being capable of healing and growth in response to trauma.

Interviewees did not call themselves “survivors;” they were complex and multi-faceted individuals in similarly whole relationships. Participants did not identify with the label “survivor,” which differs from the feminist literature’s use of the term “survivor”
(see: Davis, 2002; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gilfus, 1999; Anderson & Saunders, 2003),
and echoing Walsh’s (2006) assertion that people do not merely survive, they thrive.
This was a theme that was echoed across research questions. They all described ways in
which couples worked together to face the frequently strenuous challenges stemming
from the past in order to resolve them or create long-term solutions. While the specific
behaviors varied according to context, similar to Walsh’s (2006) framework which
predicts diverse expressions of resilience, they were all based in solid communication
patterns focused on humor, positive comparison, and differentiation. Teamwork in this
area seemed to mirror their approaches to other, unrelated concerns, further
demonstrating the over-all resilience of these couples.

Applications. True to systemic thinking, successes in this area can be important
learning tools for other areas of the relationship, and vise versa. Participants themselves
stated and implied that it is important simply to realize that it is possible to create a new
couple that is completely different from the past relationship. They also noted the
importance of finding a partner who was similarly dedicated to a nonviolent, supportive
and mutually enjoyable relationship. Exposing struggling couples to stories from these
healthy, hard-working couples may inspire necessary hope and allow them to begin to
compare themselves in positive ways to other survivor-couples.

They may also find it useful, as these couples have, to find ways to co-create
positive communication patterns that reinforce the nonviolent status of the relationship
through humor, support, positive sexuality, and other behaviors that they find helpful.
Open, goal-focused communication that sees violence-related tasks as something to be
approached as a team may benefit struggling couples in similar situations. Participants
clearly recognize the violence as a past anomaly that does not match their identity or negate their ability to deal with any potential consequences. For participants in this study, the process of the transition out of the violent relationship has been completed. They are now in the process of developing and maintaining a healthy, happy relationship as a part of a team that can deal with consequences of that past, along with everything else.

*What Contributes to the Psychosocial Resilience of Intimate Partner Violence Survivors and their Relationships?*

The verbal element of strength was also evident when considering the second research question. These examples took the form of strong couplehood communication, and positive comparison and differentiation. The element of resilience was apparent through an ethic of teamwork within couples, and a broadly-based identity from survivors. These can all contribute to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships, as noted in the prior section. Other contributors were also common themes in these interviews, stemming from the element of strengths. These took the form of expressions of reflective wisdom regarding the prior relations as well as supportive others, stemming from data mainly found in two categories. These were “Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships” and “Microsystemic Conditions.”

*Strengths Element of the Strengths Perspective*

The wisdom and insight gained during the process of transition was a common theme during interviewing, and offers examples of the strengths element of the strengths perspective. This was often applied to learning that resulted from the difficulties associated with the transition, including the source of the violence itself. Participants
mused on their theories on why the past partner was violent. They seemed to be demonstrating value in developing an understanding of the violence. This understanding did not lead interviewees to excuse their ex’s violence; instead, it contributed to a larger sense of wisdom about how to identify unhealthy partners. This wisdom seems to match the tenets of Strengths-based practice (Saleebey, 2006) by noting the ability of individuals to gain useful skills through the process of overcoming adversity. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the participants in this study appreciated the sense of control and agency that comes from knowing how to identify quickly and distance oneself from a violent partner. Participants expressed that the violent relationship did not occur randomly; there was something that they didn’t know about that person or about picking a partner. They now know this information and feel confident in making use of it. These risk factors are sometimes based in past events, but are generally combined with information about the violent person’s personality and lack of support to create a dangerous situation. Participants in this study seem to have also concluded that some survivors of prior violence will suffer from negative long-term consequences while others do not, which is congruent with existing research (Bonanno, 2004).

This combination reflects that participants and their current partners have not become abusive, in spite of experiencing many events similar to those they experienced with their exes. The participants often recognized that they know better now, but could not have at the time, for various reasons. The ability of participants to avoid negative relationships also acts to emphasize further the importance of reinforcing the differences between the current couple and the past, violent relationship by highlighting them.
The experiences of living through and leaving prior violence is different from the identity of being a victim, or even a survivor, of violence; it seems to better match with the notion of thriving (Walsh, 2006). It appears essential that the participants link themselves to the experiences and not to the identity aspect of the past. This may relate to the importance of successful comparison and differentiation between relationships, and between the wisdom and resources of their past and present selves. This also seems essential to getting the correct type of support.

Sometimes participants shared stories in which similar stressors took place in both relationships, such as financial strains or similar concerns that the interviewee was not paying enough attention during conversations. Some interviewees did not seem to notice the seeming similarity of the stressors across relationships, while at least one directly stated that it was different because the relationship and partner had different dynamics. In other words, the struggles were not part of a general attempt to gain power and control over the interviewee but were just normal relationship disputes. This supports the strengths-based (Saleebey, 2006) and resilience (Walsh, 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Benard, 2006; Weiss, 2004) approaches, which recognize that individuals do not lose their ability to function in stressful situations due to traumatic experiences. It also demonstrates the wisdom that allows participants to distinguish between abuse-related concerns and acceptable, common couple’s struggles in the new relationship.

Participants clearly recognized a difference between the events in the past and their identities. The most supportive people and organizations in their lives also recognized that difference. Their current partners, and those that support them, still reinforce this healthful differentiation. Neither the individual nor the current relationship
is defined by the violence in the past. That period is composed of a set of events that is an important anomaly within their strong, successful and romantic lives.

*Applications.* The strong differentiation between the past violence and the overall identity of participants may explain recruiting challenges for this study, and suggests the need to consider how relevant future studies and outreach efforts are promoted. It may be necessary to create distinct and holistic efforts for survivor-couples, in addition to more specific offerings for other populations that have experienced prior IPV.

Outreach professionals and the general public may need assistance with this task. Some participants noted a cultural belief that all survivors of IPV are somehow identical, and all are unlikely to enter later nonviolent relationships. Studies like this may be useful in developing programs and awareness around this issue, in addition to giving hope and a reduced sense of isolation to survivors throughout the transition process. The recognition of diversity within IPV survivors may also assist stakeholders in relevant fields in devising a broader range of intervention and assistance services in order to include survivors who do not identify as such.

*Critical Factors Element of the Strengths Perspective*

Critical factors, as an element, includes the role of those individuals and organizations that directly impact the survivor as an individual and as a member of a couple. This often took the form of supportive friends, co-workers, and service. Survivors needed a great deal of support with housing, financial concerns and employment while transitioning out of their violent relationships. This mirrors national data on the overall cost of IPV to families and communities, including the need for assistance in these areas (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003;
Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). However, they did not often use targeted emotional support. Essential support, including food, money, housing and help with moving, also seems to imply that the person has had a bad experience but isn’t identified based on that experience. For example, a person who has received help after their home burns down is not defined by the experience. A supportive community simply helps them to recover without judging them. Emotional support recognizes what happened without linking the prior crisis to a static trait about the individual. The most supportive others were noted as offering this basic support through tangible resources and essential networking, without judgment.

The most appreciated sources of emotional support did not judge or ask why the participant stayed or how it happened in the first place, implying something was wrong with them for having had the experience. It seems that these people did not limit the interviewee’s identity to those experiences, while simultaneously recognizing the need for caring and patience while the participant worked toward the termination of the violent relationship. Several interviewees directly stated that one of the benefits they received from their current relationship was an appreciation for differences between the past situation and who they “really” are, reflected in who they are now.

Individuals who violated this boundary were recognized as less supportive, or even unsupportive. Some of these unsupportive others were directly disparaging or judgmental. More often, they were family members and friends who asked questions that implied confusion in, or a decreased level of respect for, the agency of the interviewee. The focus of these others seemed to be on the past and on the violence or their seeming helplessness, instead of on the participant’s strengths and potential for a positive future as
a single person and within a later relationship. This raises significant concerns with the current focus on pathology and deficit in the IPV literature (see: Campbell & Soeken 1999; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Glass, Perrin, Campbell & Soeken, 2007; Matthews, 2004; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson, Brandt & Smith, 2002; Lown & Vega, 2001; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Golding, 1999; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Brady, 1997; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes & Nelson, 1995; Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002). Savannah illustrated this directly in a series of statements during her interview that are compiled here, in chronological order:

When you feel like everyone thinks you’re a champion, you believe you’re a champion and that helps you go on... A lot of people give the same reaction of “Why didn’t you tell me, I could have come in and saved you,” and it’s like, well, I’m not that type of person. I would, I mean it would have made it worse, you know?... I’m Savannah, I’m not, you know, [his] Savannah!

The implications of these statements were also apparent from occasional discussions about conflict in the current relationship.

Applications. It may be useful to explore the differences between supportive and unsupportive others. Family members, friends, worship community members, employers, clinicians and others have their own valid responses to knowing a domestic violence victim. These individuals and groups may need support in working through their own feelings and policies. Guidance and training may be necessary in order to improve the usefulness of their responses and interactions with those who are currently in a violent relationship, as well as those who have transitioned out. Mothers were
mentioned particularly often, perhaps because of their investment in and love for their child. Some still regularly ask unintentionally harmful questions about why their child did not leave sooner. It is likely that some of these parents are also recovering from abuse, or are or were involved in violent relationships of their own. How can we address the needs of these mothers as they struggle to understand and assist an abused adult-child? There is great potential in this relationship, and these parents deserve caring support and assistance for their difficult parallel process, whether the violence was unanticipated or the repetition of a family pattern.

The legal system was another frequent source of struggle and continued negative consequences. In this context, interviewees seemed to experience some of the most intense evaluation and judgment. They detailed many incidents that included requirements to defend their own identity and value in order to receive assistance necessary for efforts to live, much less thrive. These experiences are ongoing for some participants, with no signs of ceasing. At the same time, two participants spoke about helpful police officers and attorneys. There is great potential for these professionals to assist IPV survivors with their efforts to transition and return to their normal, nonviolent identities. Similar to mothers, it is reasonable to assume that members of the legal system struggle with questions, confusion and negative stereotypes of IPV victims. Both groups may also have had some particularly damaging experiences with victims who did not utilize their assistance in preferred ways. This research may offer them a more hopeful, multifaceted and long-term perspective on the lives of women and men who have been through the transition process. It may also offer helpful information on how to
tailor their efforts to assist in creating the best possible outcomes for those who are working to make this transition.

*Verbal Element of Strengths Perspective*

Many participants shared an example of a conflict that occurred in their current relationship. These arguments usually stemmed from a situation in which one of the partners failed to reiterate the differentiation between the current relationship and the past, abusive one and instead drew an unfavorable similarity. This was the source of memorable and intense distress for the interviewee and in every incident it was only resolved when the couple quickly moved to repeatedly and firmly differentiate itself, and both members, from the prior relationship. This separation and contrast seems to be essential to the resilience of IPV survivors and their later, nonviolent relationships. This section is similar to the verbal element noted in response to the first research question, and similar applications are suggested.

*What Experiences do Survivors Identify as Illustrators of the Resiliency of their Nonviolent Relationship?*

Relational resilience, exhibited by survivor-couples, can be considered the demonstrated ability to continually co-construct approaches that are successful in resolving or adequately controlling the impact of crisis and past traumas. Participants in this study frequently revealed illustrations of the resilience of their current relationship to any lingering consequences of the prior violence, as well as to general relationship concerns that most couples can expect. These took the form of descriptions of conversations or communication styles about their future plans, and their efforts to resolve relationship concerns of all types in order to continue to grow as a couple and
matched the resilience element of the strengths perspective. This was discussed at length within the previous research questions, and matches the diverse, process-oriented predictions stemming from the family resilience literature (Walsh, 2006).

Participants also talked about ways in which their current relationship allows both partners to grow and improve as individuals, which results in an even stronger relationship, forming a beneficial cycle. This may be considered an illustration of the critical factors element of the strengths perspective. A second major theme, also within the resilience element, was related to the nature of the continuing struggles stemming from the earlier violence. According to participants, these struggles are very real and can range from mild to terribly intense. However, many can be resolved and the rest can be adequately reduced or addressed. This information was primarily found in parts of the current relationship within the “Microsystemic Conditions” category, the “Later Smoothness and Struggles” section within the “Transition from Violent to Nonviolent Relationships” category and “Expressions of Individual and Survivor-Couple Resilience.”

Critical Factors Element of the Strengths Perspective

The element of critical factors can be used to address the third research question, as it encompasses the impact of the partnership with the current loved one on the examples of resilience shared during interviews. Several participants directly stated that their current relationship allows them to express and explore their individuality, and some even said that they feel amplified by their healthy relationship. Somehow, they can be more than what they were or otherwise would be, without implying that they would be deficient if they remained single. Indeed, participants who spent a significant period of
time in single-hood emphasized the beneficial healing and celebratory aspects of that time, relating it to the chronological aspect of the critical factors element. However, new learning came from the context and nature of the current relationship that allowed them to extend those benefits even further, matching research on the benefit of supportive partnerships (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002). Their individual enhancements contribute to a stronger relationship, too, leading to ever-increasing relational resilience, corresponding to the writing of Bonanno who noted that resilient individuals display positive relationship skills (2004). They also continued to develop their already-impressive abilities to support their current partners as lovers and as distinct individuals.

Interviewees repeatedly expressed awareness and appreciation of their partners’ support, especially in the early stages of the current relationship, matching existing research on the value of such relationships (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002). At the same time, some detailed the mutual role of supportive behaviors in their relationship, and every one offered relevant examples. Ranging from statements of their investment of trust at the beginning of the relationship, to declarations of their dedication to working through problems and building a strong future, these interviewees demonstrated that they are active participants in the well-being of their relationship. The participants in this study use an impressive set of communication skills to express their needs, even in difficult areas relating to working through past traumatic events, thereby supporting their significant others in their goal of being the best partner they can possibly be. Those with current partners who have also been abused related many instances of
direct support for the partner’s own process of healing. Their efforts, however, were not limited to violence-related situations.

*Applications.* It was important to this group that their relationships continue to reinforce the differentiation between relationships, and between members of this relationship and the past one. This was often reinforced through data related to the positive ways in which the current partners form a strong and dynamic couple. It may be useful to consider new ways in which partners can focus on their unique qualities and compare themselves in positive ways with past situations in order to reinforce the change that has already occurred. Opportunities to do this publicly may be useful, such as events in which thriving survivors and their partners can position themselves firmly “on the other side of the window” by reaching out to struggling survivors of domestic violence. There was a strong desire to assist others who had experienced, or continue to experience, intimate partner violence. Some participants used the telling of their own story as a form of outreach while others preferred not to inform others of that part of their past. Either way, awareness-raising efforts and outreach are not only useful for those who are at risk from domestic violence, but also for those who want to reinforce the change in their own status.

Following the overall pattern evolving from the data, interviewees support their partners and relationships with a wide range of behaviors and qualities. Strengths that were suppressed or dangerous in the past relationship have become strong sources of support. For instance, humor that was not expressed in the past now co-creates a basis for support and growth. Assets that aided in survival, such as resource-building skills, are increased in this relationship. These strengths and abilities hold great potential for
struggling survivor-couples who may not recognize their strengths, or have not applied them as broadly as may be necessary. Many things in these two categories are considered life-long attributes by participants, such as skills learned through family traditions or aspects of their personality. Interviewees were proud of the ways that they contribute to their relationships, and in their ability to demonstrate the mutual nature of the resilience of their nonviolent couple.

Resilience Element in the Strengths Perspective

Participants and their partners demonstrated a strong element of resilience in their ability to relieve and resolve continuing trauma-related struggles that occurred in the current relationships. Relational and complimentary individual resilience was often applied to overcoming struggles stemming from the prior relationship, especially in situations of ongoing, emotionally difficult situational triggers or legal issues. Research suggests that survivors of IPV frequently suffer from long term concerns, often including symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These struggles were very important in the lives of interviewees, but at the same time they were usually time-limited, demonstrating the resilient attribute of the process-oriented ability to grow and adapt in order to resolve challenges (Walsh, 2006). With the notable exceptions of ongoing legal trouble, continuing contact as co-parents and long-term physical injuries from prior attacks, many concerns were either resolved or improved by the time of the interview. For many participants, “trust issues” were resolved early in the relationship. Other issues, such as continuing nightmares or worries over finances, were still troublesome but had become at least somewhat less disturbing over time and with support from their significant others. Many interviewees voiced a belief that these problems could eventually be resolved with
more time and effort. Sometimes a lingering consequence had been turned into a strength, such as Marta’s confidence in the power of her rage to help her to defend herself against any future attacks from strangers.

Applications. It is important to these interviewees that they develop and explore their individual identity for their own benefit and for that of their relationship. The benefits of their relationship include the ability to resolve many of the lingering concerns stemming from violence, and to manage the rest while they work to together to create long-term solutions. These findings hold special applications for outreach workers and for those involved in survivor-couples.

Working on health of the individual is not enough; interviewees expect to make positive contributions to their relationship and are proud to support their partners, too. Professionals and members interested in couples such as these may wish to explore ways to return to static traits that the IPV survivor is proud of, as well as skills that were either oppressed or heavily utilized in the past relationship. It may be useful to encourage IPV survivors to consider aspects of their identity outside of the category of “survivor.” These interviews also indicated that it is sometimes difficult for the IPV survivor to recognize the ways in which they contribute to the relationship, although they also present no reason to believe that it is any harder for participants than for anyone else. Either way, the labeled supporting partner can also help the survivor to explore the ways in which they (the survivor) support their partner, as well. These concerns may be mutual, allowing both of them to inform the other of these aspects of the relationship. These strengths-based conversations could be sources of relational healing and enhancing for both members as well as the relationship.
Conclusions

Relational resilience, exhibited by survivor-couples, can be considered the demonstrated ability to continually co-construct approaches that are successful in resolving or adequately controlling the impact of crisis and past traumas (Walsh, 2006). Additionally, Saleebey’s (1996) five elements of the strengths perspective can be utilized to recognize and further conceptualize the strengths revealed by participants in this study. The implications and applications of this study offer answers to the three research questions:

1.) What do IPV survivors identify as their survivor-couple’s relational strengths?
2.) What contributes to the psychosocial resilience of IPV survivors and their relationships?
3.) What experiences do survivors identify as illustrators of the resiliency of their nonviolent relationship?

A main key to addressing the research questions, and for future implications, seems to take the form of communication. It is important to continually differentiate between the past violence and the present identity of interviewees. It is equally essential for survivor-couples to utilize ongoing differentiation between the past relationship and the current couple. This is done through humor, positive comparisons in conversation, comfort, and direct statements or reminders made individually and as a couple. Such differentiation regularly occurred within answers to the interview questions, suggesting that it happens outside the relationship, as well. This differentiation and comparison took place within a larger context that situates these past experiences, and any lingering consequences, within a much broader context of health and teamwork. While the prior
violence, and the associated consequences, was intense and remains an important part of their past, it does not determine or limit who they are today, or their current relationships. The most helpful support systems recognize and reinforce this.

*Future Implications*

The results and discussion of this study have yielded a wealth of implications for future practice for the fields of mental health care and IPV outreach as well as legal and policy efforts. There are also clear applications for survivor-couples, as well as those who are seeking to address transitions similar to those explored in this study. Participants themselves did not hesitate to offer their own suggestions for the future of this work.

Many participants expressed excitement of the future of this program of research. Several hoped I would continue to gather interviews in order to build on the rich foundation of this study. Some asked that I consider removing the minimum required duration of the current relationship, and perhaps include those who were happily single after leaving the past violent relationship. Both of these suggestions are valuable. Continued interviewing or parallel studies would allow the exploration of a wider range of ethnicities, nationalities, sexualities and genders.

Most participants also made suggestions for the dissemination of their stories and the findings from the associated analysis. Several specifically encouraged me to contact Oprah in hopes of spreading awareness and hope to as many people as possible. Other ideas included articles for popular press magazines, public health-fair workshops, continuing educational presentations for outreach professionals (especially in the medical or legal fields), a self-help book and a piece of theatre based on the retelling of their stories. Some of the participants have continued to keep in touch after their interviews
and nearly all of them have asked for a copy of the final dissertation. Participants commonly commented on feeling good about themselves and their relationship due to the structure of the interview questions and felt that the process itself had interventive and healing qualities.

Some of the participants felt that this information may be helpful for current nonviolent partners and family members who sought a better understanding of the transition process. One interviewee even said that she hoped her current partner had overheard parts so that he could increase his insight into why she sometimes behaved in ways she felt were odd. Resources for these partners and other loved ones are rare. It is my goal to begin to interview partners such as these in future steps within this program of research. It may even be useful to do interviews with both members of the couple at the same time.

Finally, although the interview guide was already over thirty questions long, some new questions could be added. Over the process of the study, many participants independently mentioned the role of humor and of sexuality in the new relationship. This yielded regular probing questions later in the process, following standard Grounded Theory practices. Additional questions I may wish to add, some of which were offered by participants, include:

- What strengths has your partner gained from being in this relationship?
- How could those around you have been even more supportive?
  - What might they need in order to offer that support?
- How have your family members differed in their responses, knowledge and levels of support?
How have you differed in your approach to each of them across the transition?

- What does your partner like best about you?

I look forward to continuing this program of research, hopefully with additional trained interviewers and other co-researchers. Throughout the process of this study I have received an outpouring of support and encouragement from people who feel that it is time for these stories of successful transition to be shared. Future steps in the study will allow for increased depth and diversity. My participants and I look forward to learning where the applications of this study may develop and what avenues for outreach and public enrichment will develop.

Chapter Summary

Many people express confusion and distress over the reasons that a survivor of intimate partner violence may remain in the relationship long after it has become harmful to them and to any children. It seems that those who have transitioned out of such a situation prize the opportunity to separate themselves from stereotypes about “those women.” They enhance their own health and resilience, as well as that of their relationship, by returning to (or developing) an autobiography in which that time was an important yet limited period of anomaly. The results of this study urge professionals and survivor-couples to encourage this differentiation with consistent reinforcement. A systemic perspective that includes chronology, “Microsystemic Conditions” and “Macrosystemic Conditions” is a better place to begin the search for answers to how victims find themselves in these situations, and why some do not immediately leave.
During some of the interviews, I shared a personal metaphor and asked participants’ feedback on the image. They expressed a feeling of strong connection with this description of their own experience, and it may be useful for those who have not experienced such a transition. It is the story of a person with a strong flame of personality inside them. Through various life events that could happen to anyone, the flame finds itself reduced to an ember. However, an ember can burn with intense heat and, with proper care, can later spark a great fire. When a person finds themselves in a violent relationship, they must move quickly to protect the ember of their true selves from any further threat. Sometimes that requires acting in unusual ways, or even forgetting what the strong flame was like. It would even make perfect sense to hide all traces of the ember of their true selves from others. However, when the time is safe to escape with the ember intact, they will. With time, air, care and the right resources they find that the ember can grow into an even stronger flame, and they find themselves again. They have learned how to light a mighty fire from a precious ember, and that knowledge allows them to burn even more brightly. They now know how to make sure that the fire is never threatened like that again, too. They never lost who they were, they simply needed to do what was necessary to nourish and protect the ember of themselves until it was possible to leave the situation and reignite themselves fully.

In this metaphor, the context of violence does not reflect on who the interviewee was as a person, only on what they needed to do to preserve themselves. The vibrant person they are now is who they always were; the context is what has changed. In fact, they are now better than they were in many ways, including through their current relationship. Some participants shared metaphors about protecting a seed from the desert,
then planting it during single-hood or with their current partner, so that it could continue
to grow into a mighty tree within their latter relationship. One participant drew a parallel
to a stalk of corn that surrounds the ear in layers of leaves to grow and protect it. When
she left her violent relationship she began the process of peeling back the leaves to reveal
a bright and healthy cob of corn. Every participant in this study offered an array of
related ways to address the questions framing this study. Each interviewee is an
increasingly bright flame lit from a cherished ember, a mighty tree sprung from a
preciously guarded seed, or a nourishing and sweet ear of corn freed from protective
leaves. They contribute mutually to their relationships as such and show every indication
of thriving in the face of considerable trauma that will be kept firmly in the past.
References


## Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current Relationship Length</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income in Thousands</th>
<th>Faith</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Het</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>0 - 30</td>
<td>Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
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<td>Het</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Tech/Trade School</td>
<td>30 - 50</td>
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<td>1 year</td>
<td>Het</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>0 - 30</td>
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<td>Tech/Trade School</td>
<td>30 - 50</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>0 - 30</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>70 +</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>13 months</td>
<td>Het</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>50 - 70</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
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<td>15 years</td>
<td>Hom</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>30 - 50</td>
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<td>Sasha</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
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<td>Some College</td>
<td>50 - 70</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
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<td>Savannah</td>
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<td>Het</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White and Native American</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>0 - 30</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Calls for Participants

My name is Ruth Neustifter, and I am a doctoral student at The University of Georgia. It has been an honor for me to work with survivors of domestic violence and their partners for over seven years, including through Project Safe. I also do research in this area. I am interested in committed, enjoyable and mutually beneficial relationships in which at least one member has survived domestic violence in a different relationship. My research project explores positive things about these couples, and how they create and maintain their relationships. This study involves brief questionnaires, followed by interviews with a member who has survived prior domestic violence. If you would like to learn more about this study, or to find out if you qualify to participate, leave a message for me at (706) 254-6794 with your name and phone number. You may also visit www.survivorcouples.com for more information. Please pass this information on to anyone you know who may be interested in participating!

Are you in a nonabusive, nonviolent relationship now, after leaving a physically or emotionally violent or abusive relationship in the past?

I’m Ruth Neustifter, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. I have worked with survivors of domestic violence for years, and now doing a research project in this area. I’m interested in how survivors of intimate partner violence (physical, verbal and emotional) make the transition out of the violent relationship, and into new relationships
with a nonviolent partner. My research project explores positive things about these survivors, and how they create and maintain their new, nonviolent relationships. This study involves brief questionnaires, followed by interviews with these survivors. If you would like to learn more about this study, or to find out if you qualify to participate, leave a message for me at (706) 254-6794 with your name and phone number. You may also visit www.survivorcouples.com for more information. Please pass this information on to anyone you know who may be interested in participating!

A research project at the University of Georgia is being held to explore strengths in certain couples. Members of committed and stable relationships in which at least one member has survived domestic violence in a different relationship are sought. This study involves brief questionnaires, and one or two interviews. For more information about participation, leave a message for Ruth at (706) 254-6794 with your name and phone number or visit www.survivorcouples.com.

A research project at the University of Georgia is being held to explore strengths in certain couples. Women and men in a nonabusive, nonviolent relationship now, after leaving a physically or emotionally violent or abusive relationship in the past are invited to participate. This study involves brief questionnaires, and one or two interviews. For more information about participation, leave a message for Ruth at (706) 254-6794 with your name and phone number or visit www.survivorcouples.com.
Appendix C
Webpage and Flyer

AN EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES ACROSS RELATIONSHIPS

A Research Study at The University of Georgia

Are you in a nonviolent, nonabusive relationship now, after leaving a physically or emotionally violent or abusive relationship in the past?

We are seeking women and men to interview for a new study on the experiences that people have across these different relationships. If you fit the following criteria, we invite you to call for more information:

• In a committed relationship of at least 1 year, with no plans to break up
• There has never been any domestic violence (physical or emotional) in the current relationship

• You survived domestic violence (physical or emotional) in a past relationship

• You are willing to be interviewed on audio tape

• You are not currently involved in psychotherapy

• You are at least 21 years old

Participants will be interviewed in person 1 or 2 times; the first interview will be between 1.5 and 3 hours, the second interview, if necessary, will be up to 1 hour. In appreciation of their time, participants will receive a gift certificate for two movie tickets.

**The confidentiality of all participants is strictly protected.**

If you would like more information, or to find out if you qualify to participate, please contact Ruth Neustifter at (706) 254-6794 or visit www.SurvivorCouples.com
Appendix D

Phone Screening Tool

Thank you for calling to learn more about this study. My name is Ruth Neustifter and I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, working under Dr. Lewis. We’re both in the department of Child and Family Development. I do research and volunteer with survivors of domestic violence. To me violence means a lot more than hitting, such as emotional, verbal and financial things. I’m especially interested in learning about how survivors successfully make the transition from a violent relationship to a nonviolent one. For this study, I’ll be interviewing survivors like that who are interested in telling me a little bit about their past, violent relationship but mostly about their experiences in the non-violent relationship. Little is known about survivors of intimate partner violence who later have nonviolent relationships. There is also little known about these later nonviolent relationships. By doing research in this area, knowledge may be created to better serve survivors of intimate partner violence and their later, nonviolent relationships. People who participate will get a gift certificate for a pair of movie tickets. If this sounds like something you might be interested in, then I would be pleased to answer any questions, and then ask you some questions to see if you fit our criteria for participating. This should take about 10 minutes of your time and you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may stop this interview at any time. If you don’t qualify for this study, the information you give me today will be
destroyed right away. Also, if you have any questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia at 706-542-3199.

Date & Time of Call __________________________________________________

Name ___________________________   Phone _____________________________

1.) Are you currently in a committed relationship? That includes dating, living together, and so on. ______

2.) Do you anticipate breaking up in the foreseeable future? ________

3.) How long have you been together? ________

4.) Have you ever experienced any domestic violence with this partner? ________

5.) Are you willing and able to meet with me for an interview that will last from 1.5-3.0 hours, plus a possible second interview that could last up to an hour? ________

6.) Are you willing to be audio recorded, using a fake name, during the interview? ________

7.) Are you currently involved in psychotherapy? ________

8.) Are you at least 21 years old? ________

9.) Is there anything else you would like me to know about the things I just asked you? ________

If all criteria are met:

Thank you for giving me all of this information! It looks like you fit the criteria to participate. Do you have any other questions?
Great! Let’s schedule a day and time for the first interview: ____________________________

We can meet any place where we feel comfortable. Keep in mind that we might be there for up to 3 hours, and consider the level of privacy you want.

Location:

_______________________________________________________________________

Thank you! Please call me at this number (706 254-6794) as soon as possible if you need to cancel or reschedule. Would you like me to give you a reminder call the day before?

_______________________

Thank you, I’ll see you there!
Appendix E

Demographic Survey Tool

What year were you born? _________

In what country were you born? ______________

What is your gender? ________

What is your race and/or ethnicity? ____________________________

Which best describes your sexuality?

__ Heterosexual

__ Homosexual

__ Bisexual

__ Other (please specify) ____________

What is your occupation? _______________

Please mark the highest level of education that you have completed

__High school or GED

__Technical or trade school

__ Some college

__Undergraduate college degree
Graduate college degree  
None of the above

How many children do you have? ______

How many children are in your care? ___

What is your annual household income?

Under $30,000  
$30,000 - $50,000  
$50,000 - $70,000  
$70,000 +

What is your religious affiliation, if any? ______________________

What is your relationship status now?

Dating with multiple partners  
Dating with one committed partner (infidelity should still be marked here)  
Engaged  
Living together  
Married or similarly committed partnered relationship  
Other (please specify) ______________________

How long have you been in your current relationship? _____________________

What kind of relationship was the violent one? (mark all that apply)

Dating – uncommitted or with multiple partners  
Dating with one committed partner (infidelity in a committed relationship should be
marked here)

__ Engaged
__ Lived together
__ Married or similarly committed partnered partnership
__ Other (please specify) ____________

When did previous physically and/or emotionally violent intimate relationship/s take place?

___/____ to ___/______ (months and years)
___/____ to ___/______
___/____ to ___/______ (you may add more below, as needed)

Please mark any option below that applies to you:

__ I have been raped or experienced forced sex as an adult by someone I was never in a relationship with.

__ I experienced physical and/or emotional abuse as a child.

If there is any other information you would like to write at this time, please use the space below or the back of this page.
Thank you.

I sincerely appreciate your time and effort in answering these questions.

If you would prefer to receive the summary of today’s interview by email, please write your preferred email address: ____________________________

If you would prefer to receive the summary of today’s interview by postal mail, please write your name and mailing address:

________________________________________________________________________

Please choose a fake name (different from your real name) for use during this project: ________________
Appendix F

Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A - Prior Relationship &amp; Transition Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. So, how did you decide to participate in this study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. As you know, this interview will have questions about both your experiences in your past, violent relationship/s, and your current, nonviolent relationship. May I ask you to tell me about that/those violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you describe that/those relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did you come to realize that it/they was/were violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How did you talk to others about that/those relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For many people it takes some time to recover from that kind of relationship, especially to the point of having new, nonviolent relationships. Could you tell me about what it was like for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How were you able to transition into a non-violent relationship, considering everything that happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What do you tell others about the violent relationship/s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What do you tell others about your transition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interview Guide

#### B - Between Relationships

1. Was there any time when you were single between your violent and nonviolent relationships?
2. Please tell me about what it was like to be out of the violent relationship/s and single.

#### C - Nonviolent Relationship

1. Now you are in a nonviolent relationship. Is this your first nonviolent relationship since the violent one/s?
2. How did you come to realize that this is a nonviolent relationship?
3. How would you describe this relationship?
4. How do you talk to others about this relationship?
5. Tell me about any ways the things from the violent relationship/s have popped up in this relationship, good or bad.
6. How do you respond to them?
7. What kinds of conversations do the two of you have about that/those prior relationship/s?
8. How do others talk about your current relationship?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Interview Guide</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D - Strengths</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. When you’re going about your day and you just sort of start thinking about that/ those relationship/s, what sorts of things cross your mind?
| 2. What are your favorite things about this relationship?
| 3. What do you two work on improving in your relationship now? How?
| 4. What assets do each of you bring to this relationship? |
| **E - Resilience** |
| 1. Tell me about any issues that other couples in your position might face, but you two are able to take in stride.
| 2. Which of these challenges have given you special insight, strength or skill?
| 3. What have you learned about yourself and your world from working together on these things?
| 4. What are special qualities about yourself that you rely on?
| 5. What are special qualities about this relationship that you rely on? |
| **F - Community** |
| 1. What people have given you special support, understanding or guidance?
| 2. What is it that these people have given you that is so exceptional?
| 3. How did you find them, or how did they find you?
| 4. What did they respond to in you? |
| **G - Ending Questions** |
| 1. Is there anything else that I should have asked, or that you would like to tell me?
| 2. Is there anything you would like to ask me about this interview, or anything else? |
Appendix G

Resources

Intimate Partner Violence Resources - Athens Area

If you need information about intimate partner violence, or help for yourself or someone else, please use the resources on this list. These three resources can provide assistance and connect you with other resources in your area. They can also offer help and referrals that are appropriate for diverse genders and sexualities.

**Project Safe – (706) 543-3331**

Project Safe is a local, non-profit organization that provides a safe shelter, a 24-hour hotline, referrals and support groups for women, and their children, who are victims of domestic violence. This phone number is staffed 24/7.

**Community Connection of North East Georgia – 211 or (706) 353-1313**

This service is the "community connection" for those who need help. Callers can receive referrals and information on human services such as counseling, financial management, food, shelter and affordable housing.
National Domestic Violence Hotline - 800-799-SAFE or TDD 800-787-3224

This national hotline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English, Spanish, and other languages. The Hotline can give you the phone numbers of local domestic violence shelters and other resources.

Psychotherapeutic Resources

Family Counseling Service – (706) 369-7911

McPhaul Family Therapy Clinic – (706) 542-4486

School of Psychology Clinic – (706) 542-4265

Samaritan Counseling – (706) 369-7922

If you, or someone you know, is in physical danger dial 911 immediately!
Intimate Partner Violence Resources - National

If you need information about intimate partner violence, or help for yourself or someone else, please use the resources on this list. These resources can provide assistance and connect you with other resources in your area. They can also offer help and referrals that are appropriate for diverse genders and sexualities.

National Domestic Violence Hotline - 800-799-SAFE or TDD 800-787-3224
This national hotline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English, Spanish, and other languages. The Hotline can give you the phone numbers of local domestic violence shelters and other resources.

You can get more information online at these websites. Remember, though, that computer use can be easily monitored and it may not be safe for someone in a violent relationship to look at these websites.

National Domestic Violence Hotline’s website: http://www.ndvh.org

National Network to End Domestic Violence: http://www.nnedv.org

National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence: http://www.ncdsv.org

If you, or someone you know, is in physical danger dial 911 immediately!
Power and Control Wheel

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behavior by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman’s life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.

Developed by:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
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Duluth, MN 55802
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Produced and distributed by:
NATIONAL CENTER
on Domestic and Sexual Violence
training - consulting - advocacy
4012 Hidden Creek Blvd. • Austin, Texas 78734
512.457.9023 (phone and fax) • www.ncdsv.org
Appendix H

Interview Summaries

Alexis

Alexis stopped in at a coffee shop to do her interview between plans with friends. In fact, it was one of her friends who suggested she participate in the study as a way to help a fellow graduate student and to gain experience with research. Alexis enjoys a long distance relationship with a young man she first met years before she considered dating him; she “glow[ed]” when speaking about him during the interview.

Alexis values friends and dating relationships, and prizes verbal communication. In the early 2000s Alexis began dating a significantly older man that she met at work. She noted “he was the first person that I ever dated who was just so hard to get in you know… he emotionally would not let me in to his life, and that was very new for me…” Alexis worked hard to make the relationship work, often wondering, “What’s wrong with me? Why is he acting this way?” He often showed up at her shared apartment, drunk and abusive. Reflecting on her time in with him, she shared it was “an abusive relationship on several levels… emotionally and… mentally and… at the very end he became physically abusive and that’s when I finally just ended it.”

While it was an awful experience, Alexis credits it for helping her to appreciate her current relationship. “I do and I don’t regret it, you know… I do regret it because that was the worst year… it was horrible and a lot of pain… on all levels… but I don’t regret it because I think every, every experience in life is a learning experience. I fully
believe that if I had not had to go through that horrible situation then I probably wouldn’t even be able to appreciate the person that I’m with now as much as I do… now I have the great [relationship] and I 100% appreciate what I have now.”

Alexis’s friends and a local domestic violence crisis center supported her during the abusive relationship and as she faced the legal system. She became reacquainted with her current partner a few years after she broke up with the abusive boyfriend. She ended another nonviolent relationship and prepared to move to another area for her education. The combination of these changes helped her to have a smooth and exciting transition into her current relationship. The two of them work together to help her recover from an unrelated violent crime that occurred between the two relationships; an event that had a far greater impact on her than the violent relationship.

Alexis and her partner look forward to living closer to each other soon. They speak on the phone regularly and enjoy spending time together when they can. When asked to describe their relationship, she laugh and responds, “Perfect. I mean, really honestly, this is the first time I’ve ever had a smile, a constant smile, on my face while I’ve been in a relationship.”

*Ann*

Reclining by a window that overlooks the scenic landscape, Ann chose the bedroom she shares with her boyfriend for her interview. Ann said she wanted to participate in the interview because “I’ve come to the point where I feel comfortable talking about it… when the opportunity came up to do this, it… felt like it was a good time to be able to talk about it.” Ann’s laughter rang often during the interview as she shared stories of adventures and sweet conversations with her beloved.
Ann shared that she “got married very young,” which was supported by the conservative and “Armageddon focused” religion that both of their families practiced. She entered the relationship with a very high work ethic and a wealth of family building skills, as their faith encouraged women to become a “very traditional kind of housewife.” Ann reflected that “right from the beginning, it didn’t feel good, but I didn’t know that it was supposed to feel any other way…” Over the course of the relationship Ann struggled to find ways to support her family through poverty as he spent money on failed ventures, moved the family often, and jumped from job to job. In spite of her dedication, she was met with financial control, marital rape, emotional abuse and more. “I had no way to provide for our kids, and, he was very angry, um, and there was, there wasn’t physical hitting in our marriage, but there was definitely, um, always that sense that I didn’t have a right to make decisions.” Ann returned to school against his wishes, was greeted with many successes in her new workplaces, and developed the resources and support necessary to leave her church and then obtain a divorce. When she moved out, her children helped her to get an apartment of her own from which she enjoyed several years of healing, exploration, friends, and peace.

After Ann’s best friend re-married, she encouraged Ann to begin dating. Ann met her current partner through an online dating site. The two of them have worked together to build on the healing Ann initiated while she was single, and she continues to work on overcoming financial concerns and enjoying being “goofy” with her sweetheart. Together, they enjoy a calm, mutually supportive relationship in which they continually look for new ways to be romantic, from travel to glasses of wine on the balcony and “keeping a little bit of mystique and the good kind of tension in the relationship.”
Ann is not sure if marriage is something she wants for the future, as she is enjoying their relationship so much just the way it is. “I found so much out about myself that I didn’t know. [I didn’t know that] I was such a goofball because I’d always been expected to be so ladylike and so responsible. It’s just so much fun to just be goofy with somebody and have them appreciate it and laugh and be goofy right back.” Her boyfriend appreciates her just as much, though. “I used to say, ‘Oh I’m so lucky’ and he’d say ‘No, we’re so lucky… we deserve each other.’”

Ginger

Twisting through city streets, Ginger shared her thoughts from the passenger seat as she rode from location to location for her job. She laughed as she commented that she volunteered to participate because “I love you. I want to help as much as possible… I probably qualify.” Her current boyfriend was her good friend for years before they started dating. They have a long distance relationship now, and are looking forward to living closer to each other as soon as possible.

Ginger balances her preference for privacy with an enjoyment of social time, and has an impressive history of helping abused pets and people. She describes her former relationship as “situational violence” and mentioned that he never held a job, was “manipulative,” emotionally abusive, unfaithful and had “substance issues.” At times she had bruises from their fights, although she sometimes did not hesitate to hit him back when he was violent. She noted that her bruises were mild compared to the intense “isolation” and “lethality factors” that included threats to her pets and plans and attempts to kill her. Ginger states, “I didn’t want anyone to hate him… [but when] he cheated on me and got the girl pregnant I had had enough.” Her family suggested that she move out
of her small town and find a new job, at which point she and her current boyfriend began to build an intimate relationship after years of platonic yet flirtatious friendship.

For Ginger and her boyfriend the distance is a far greater issue than any unresolved concerns from her past relationship. Their families support their relationship and offer them a great deal of encouragement, and she has even become friends with one of her ex-partner’s former girlfriends! Ginger and her sweetheart enjoy talking on the phone and brief visits, as time and resources allow. Although both of them are new to calm relationships, Ginger says that talking things out comes naturally to them. “I don’t think we had to learn to, to do that. I think it’s something that we always wanted, um, and we never had, and so we kind of talked, we talked about [it] and we agreed upon it, that it was something that we wanted and we never had and so that’s just how we, that’s how we roll.”

In addition to their conversations, they enjoy a shared sense of humor and a dedication to sexual pleasure. Ginger looks forward to exploring their verbal and sexual interactions once they are able to live closer to each other. Until then, their long term friendship and her deep love help them to continue to grow as a couple. “I feel like I have so much love it can overcome anything.”

Layla

Layla stretched out in her pajamas for her interview, comfortably bundled in her bed next to a plate of cookies for two. When asked why she volunteered, she smiled and responded “because I qualify.” Layla is also in a long distance relationship. They use a diverse range of technologies to stay in touch, often bonding over their shared love for music as a form of expression.
For Layla, interpersonal relationships and communication are prized. Lyrics, writing, conversation and sexuality are all dynamic forms of conversation for her and she often prefers to remain friends with former dating partners. It comes as no surprise when she states that she is still friends with her abusive ex-partner. In order to do this, she had to come to peace with a verbally and emotionally violent relationship. “I spent [several] years with a man who, because of his own messed up way of thinking, took his anger out on me for past relationships, what other people did, other people’s mistakes, and made them my problem and talked down to me in a way that I’ve never experienced anybody else doing… to me before.” Over the years the relationship was often good, but the bad parts were not worth it. “I had to let myself get to a certain, a certain breaking point where I was in control and I took the control away from him which he shouldn’t have had in the first place.” She broke up with him with a brief text message, confident that her parting words would force him to recognize her newfound control and power.

After ending the relationship, Layla missed him, but otherwise had a smooth transition into her new relationship. She met her current boyfriend online and adores the way they communicate together, although he has many different qualities than her ex-partner. “He’s an artist and he definitely has a passion for many things and the way that he expresses himself is completely different than how the other guy did, always did. He can talk to me in a way that doesn’t make me feel that I’m being chastised by a parent. I think it was just, it took, it took a little bit of time, but it didn’t take that long for me to realize that he was also a very good match for me, but in a lot of different, a lot of other ways.”
Layla enjoys her visits with her boyfriend, and looks forward to his vacations from graduate school. The two of them continue to work on how they communicate, especially sexually, and she hopes that the two of them are able to spend more time together as soon as he graduates. Both of them are excellent problem solvers, and she is confident that they can survive the distance as long as they are both dedicated. Until then, she spends times with her friends, laughing and enjoying each other’s company. “…they would probably all tell you that I’m loyal and that I give pretty decent advice and that I’m fun and that I have a good sense of humor and that I’m the shit, pretty much.”

Marta

Marta kissed her husband on his way to work then prepared tea for two before settling at the dining room table for her interview. A friend of hers invited her to volunteer for the research project, and she decided “I can absolutely do this, yeah.” A true artist at heart, Marta prefers to process her thoughts and feelings through performance. Her spouse shares in her passions and the two of them value a combination of working and loving aspects to their relationship.

Nearly two decades ago Marta married her ex-partner, unaware of the impact that his substance abuse and violence would have on their relationship. “He was horribly chemically addicted and I really was not aware of how extreme the addiction was.” Although they separated within a few years of their marriage, the two of them continued to stay in contact as Marta sought to develop positive opportunities for their daughter to interact with her father. During their relationship, and for a number of years after they separated, he brought physical violence, verbal and emotional abuse, stalking, abduction and drug-influenced behavior into her home. Marta and her strong network of friends,
lovers, and helpful police officers worked together to ensure that their child was raised well, and that Marta could continue to develop as an artist and community member.

Confidence radiates from Marta as she describes the fruitful balance she has created between the many facets of her personal, social and professional lives. When it comes to her current spouse, her face lights up and she is instantly ready with stories of love and teamwork.

They met through a professional partnership, both of them having experienced abusive partners. The two of them work together to maintain appropriate communications with both of their ex-partners. “It’s always very trippy” to interact with ex-partners, but it is an important part of their substantial network. They also focus on growing as lovers and business partners. Marta shares that “sometimes we have to sit down with each other and say ‘what hat are we wearing right now…’” Now that their children are out of the house, they are able to spend more on their goals as a couple. She is particularly supportive of helping him to increase his ability to be confrontational with her, and he helps her to be more organized. Their friends know them as “the love-birds” and she shares that one of her favorite parts of the relationship is their shared sense of humor. “I don’t think you should ever be married to somebody who does not share your sense of humor. Um, both of us have a really wicked, twisted, wonderful sense of humor.”

MS

Surrounded by whirring computers long after everyone else in the building had gone home, MS chose an office for her interview. MS is an active advocate for survivors of intimate partner violence, especially women in young adulthood, fueling her interest in
participating in this project. “This is a very important topic and people need to understand… You see in the literature ‘why don’t they leave…’ and it’s not about that. It’s about so much more.” When she is not working on her many projects, MS spends time with her partner laughing, sharing about their day, and supporting each other’s goals.

When MS met and married her ex-partner she was a young teenager, and in the beginning she was enamored with his attention. She laughs as she recalls that “he pretty much at the beginning stopped me from doing things, from… staying in school and, and doing the types of things I needed to do to, to further myself. And looking back on it now, I can see how that was control, but at the time… I can remember telling people [that] he worships the ground I walk on.” Over the course of their relationship MS had several children, and dedicated herself to protecting them from his “violent outbursts,” emotional and verbal abuse, financial strangulation, irrational accusations and more, all of which further exacerbated her pre-existing health problems.

No one knew about the violence, except for a legal system that was largely unsupportive. “I was… a young mom with zero skills and zero education… no finances and no plan and no safety net. Everything… was against me when I was trying to prosecute. The courts didn’t listen… he was God. He was the head of the household so, therefore… he controlled what went on, including me… Karma always comes back… and for them to completely discount what was happening with me, and what was happening with my children, because they didn’t want one more woman in their county on assistance… I don’t know. People need to step up and realize this is a big issue and it needs to be dealt with and [not] ignore what is happening in families.”
When her young child suggested that they pick up a few toys before the father got home, in order to keep him calm, MS realized that she had to develop a way to take her children and leave. She returned to school against his wishes and built up resources over a period of several years. After a weekend of binging left him fast asleep, she snuck out with her children. He stalked her and begged her to return, but MS was ready to spend some time taking care of her children and herself.

MS met her current partner when he introduced himself to her over hamburgers. She wasn’t interested in dating, but when he offered his phone number with the willingness to leave the future up to her, she decided to keep his card. From the beginning of their relationship he sought ways to ensure that she was comfortable, emotionally supported, and confident in his caring love for her. “He helped me to just pull away all those layers of victimization, and be able to find… my own inner strength and my own… voice.”

They developed into a solid team ready to succeed in building their relationship, child rearing, graduate school, and supporting each other’s personal and professional goals. They continue to work on finding new ways for MS to bring her strong “libido” more deeply into the relationship, although their strong communication skills allow them to work together on any problem that comes their way. MS looks forward to finishing her current degree program and romancing each other during more frequent travels. “We still feel the same that we felt when we first started getting together and first started dating… We ask ourselves all the time, ‘Do you think this is going to stop anytime soon?’ Both of us… [say] ‘No!’ ”
Napoleon

Napoleon selected the outdoor tables of a busy coffee shop for his morning interview, his words mingling with the sounds of passing cars and a sudden rainstorm. Although few people know about his violent relationship, he volunteered because “if the research can help other people, either dealing with this situation or in order to get out of it or… to overcome the odds… I’ll help.” Napoleon is proud to introduce his girlfriend before she leaves for work, his eyes following her with a smile as the interview begins.

A trained instructor in fighting and self-defense skills, Napoleon was raised to believe that “when it comes to females, I don’t hit females.” “My momma raised me different,” he added. Although the relationship started strong, less than a year after meeting his ex-girlfriend, her personality, combined with substance abuse, would lead to many violent fights. She was an athletic woman and verbal arguments escalated quickly, especially about her cheating and substance use. A good friend of his began to fear that she might try to kill Napoleon in his sleep and he responded that, “It was a matter of I’m a light sleeper, that’s, that is sick.”

The relationship came to an end when Napoleon was arrested for fleeing after pushing her away during an attack, causing her to fall. While waiting for someone to post bond, he had “a moment of clarity.” “When I was in jail, I was sitting there caught back with my arms behind my head saying ‘I’m free now, I’m free now.’ It wasn’t but about two weeks later that she came and bonded me out. I didn’t want her to. I was happy being in jail, I was free.” Napoleon accepted a concerned friend’s offer for a camping trip, and when he returned she was gone. After that experience he decided to spend some time focusing on himself, renovating his home, and enjoying the company of many
women. While he did date actively, it was nothing serious, “…that was just my way of building my confidence back up.”

Napoleon and his current girlfriend saw each other around town and enjoyed flirting. Both of them were immediately attracted to each other and began a committed relationship that retains high levels of conversation and sexuality. She had also experienced some difficult things in life before meeting him, and they bonded over shared experiences and the ability to understand and support each other. Their friends and family encourage Napoleon to learn from her maturity, and he brings new levity and a bit of extra craziness to the relationship. They are dedicated to a passionate, nonviolent relationship and do not hide from problems when they pop up. It won’t be too long before they begin building a large family of their own! When asked to describe his relationship, Napoleon grins and replies, “Absolutely beautiful… Smartest thing I’ve ever done.”

Sara

Sitting on a couch in her office on a quiet Saturday morning, Sara settled in for her interview. Her partner had suggested that she consider participating. “She knows my history and she also said that y’all… would be thrilled to get some gay couples involved, so I’m here to represent.” The two of them make a dynamic team, blending Sara’s boisterous ‘silliness’ with her partner’s calm, serious side.

Sara enjoyed many aspects of her relationship with her ex-partner. It was “Loving, supportive… interesting, adventurous because of all the things that I learned… while in that relationship and a lot of the people I met.” Sara describes her as often being “incredibly sweet and vulnerable… because she’d been through so much and… she had a
lot of issues.” At the same time, “isolation was always part of the agenda.” It was an “emotionally abusive” relationship in which Sara worked hard to try to reduce the possibility of sudden, angry tirades. She woke up early in the mornings to keep their home spotless, and was often embarrassed when her former partner would “freak out” and start “yelling at [her]” in front of friends. Privately, Sara would sometimes try to defend herself, but she preferred to wait quietly through the awkwardness when they had company. After a number of years Sara had the opportunity to make a professional transition and moved out. It was an exciting time of new opportunities, although her ex-partner was sad about the break-up.

Soon after moving she made connections with a group of friends that regularly met for social events, and that is where she met her current partner. For Sara, the transition into a new couple was not hindered by her former relationship. She kept in touch with her ex-partner for a few years, and they eventually drifted apart. The last time they spoke, Sara and her partner met with Sara’s ex-partner and her new partner for an amicable dinner. While her friends and her mother have always been there for Sara, they are especially happy for her now that she has found so much happiness in her relationship.

Sara cherishes the calmness of her relationship, and their substantial social network. She remains very attracted to her current partner’s “brilliance,” and reported that she has “learned so much about respect being with her.” When asked what she likes about the current relationship she says, “the love and… the peacefulness and the… security… It’s like there’s more of me when [she is] around.” They are already well established, and so they look forward to continuing to grow together as a couple, and in
their separate professional efforts. They both appreciate each other’s unique attributes, and how they are able to blend them to encourage and care for each other. As a couple they rely on “the connectedness… and the love.”

Sasha

Sasha sat at an outdoor table of an urban café with her new puppy, who offered wiggles and kisses throughout the interview. She and her fluffy companion are considering leaving her professional position for graduate school within the next few years, inspiring her decision to participate. “I thought it would be interesting… I want to go to grad school, get my Ph.D.” She hopes that her move will also bring her closer to her boyfriend, who recently graduated and was recruited for a job in another state.

A dynamic “planner” who prides herself on being open to “different ideas and different opinions,” Sasha has earned success in many areas of her life. In high school she fell for an upperclassman and entered her first serious relationship with him. When she graduated she enrolled in an undergraduate program that allowed her to visit him on the weekends. During the relationship he isolated her, limited her activities at her own school, and had an affair. He also expected her to take care of his domestic needs, including having sex that she wasn’t interested in, in order to please him. “Basically he would like to control any of my actions. I would come every weekend from [my college] up to his school and he didn’t like me going out with him and his friends… I would stay in his apartment and basically wash his clothes and clean up… He would come home [at] three or four and then I would make him food and we would go to bed or whatever. One day… his phone rang and… it was a text message and it said… ‘I got something from
Victoria Secret for us’… so apparently he was dating another girl for the past two years also, along with me.”

Sasha told him to leave his other girlfriend, but he refused. She broke up with him and took an opportunity to study abroad for a semester, enjoying a more open European culture where friendships and respect were heavily valued among peers and lovers. Without the pressure to be in a relationship, and surrounded by new possibilities, she celebrated her freedom and developed a new sense of self. Her ex-partner stayed in touch with her over the years in hopes of getting back together, but Sasha was done with him.

On Valentine’s Day Sasha made a pledge to her friends with no idea of how it would impact her life. She told them, “I’m going to open up my view, you know, I’m going to give any good guy a chance and then I met him the next day, on the bus on campus and he was so nervous to talk to me.” This time she was a couple of years older and she became his first serious girlfriend. Sasha brought her maturity and life lessons to the relationship, while he brought freshness, excitement and romance. “It’s interesting because he’s never been jaded or hurt before by any girl or any relationship,” she noted. They have worked hard together to develop an egalitarian relationship in which they both choose activities and share household tasks. The relationship is enhanced by their mutual appreciation and her strength. She is with him because she wants to be, not because she feels that she should stay. He has helped her to invest in working things out together, and they spend many hours conversing over the phone and online between visits.

Sasha is looking forward to the next stage in their relationship, in which he has a more substantial income and, perhaps, when she is a student in a nearby graduate
program. While she admits that the time she spent with her ex-partner was awful, she considers it a part of her life’s journey and is grateful for where she is now. She laughs as she reflects on her life and her loving relationship. “Honestly… it’s helped me. …I think you have to love a jerk to appreciate a good guy.”

ST

ST sat at a bistro table inside the bookstore, accompanied by a leather briefcase filled with professional documents, outreach materials, photos, and artistic masterpieces created by her eldest child. When she heard about the interviews she said that she responded quickly because “I’ve been working with domestic violence victims for a year now, and… our state has got a bad history of domestic violence and I want to help. I want to change it.” Indeed, she and her husband are dedicated to working with local policy makers and social service organizations to improve the odds for survivors of intimate partner violence and their children.

A dedicated mother, ST married a man she met in her hometown and they began a family. She realizes now that he struggled with alcoholism from the start, but it wasn’t until several years into the relationship that things suddenly changed. She was stunned by the initial act of physical violence, which happened while she breast feeding. “He came home at seven or eight in the morning, and he’s drunk. Walked up to me and just punched me in the eye.” The battering, emotional abuse, withholding of medical care, rape and verbal attacks became increasingly common as she struggled to protect her children, maintain her job, and hide the bruises from others. “After that then it was just, it was like every week. He’d come home, when he did come home he was drunk, and he would just take it out on me… if [the blinds] weren’t straight… if I didn’t vacuum, if he
could see the dust… in the carpet… I stayed because… I was young… He told me if I left, he would take my son and I’d never see him.” It was not an idle threat, as he even now continues to engage her in custody battles while exposing her son to on-going violence on court-ordered visits. The police and legal system failed to protect or assist her while she developed the resources to leave, from his violent stalking behavior after they left, and they continue to neglect the needs of her son, who has filed multiple police reports on him since the end of the relationship.

After surviving one of many heinous, life-threatening nights of violence, ST’s young son “told the whole class that his dad had a knife to his mom’s throat… He’s going to kill, he’s going to slice her neck.” Late that night ST attempted to sneak out of the house with their son but he attacked her again, and her son called 911. The police refused to allow her to use the family car and she had no friends that were willing to help. She called a stranger with whom she had confided a week before, while trying to find a used car for her escape. He responded immediately and assisted them in staying at hotel until she was able to obtain help from her church and family in establishing a new apartment with her son. She developed a friendship with this man while enjoying her single-hood, and her son quickly became attached to him. Eventually he asked his mom to date him “because he doesn’t make you cry and he’s nice to us.” It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship, full of support, healing, laughter, care and a shared dedication to assisting other women in need.

ST and her current husband work together to raise their children and battle her ex-partner’s perpetual legal violence against them. Area organizations have responded to ST, who now shares her story openly to help other violence survivors and to encourage
others to improve local policy and services. She shared news articles and stories of her first professional presentations as a featured speaker, then cleared the table and laid out photos of her family. Pointing to her children, she laughed at her anxiety over going down a tall playground slide and beamed over the crayon drawings placed carefully next to the photographs. She knows that her friends and family can see the difference. “They just all say they know it’s good because they can see [my son is] happy and they see that I’m happy, and so I don’t even have to tell them.”

*Savanah*

Savanah’s husband prepared dinner across the house while she introduced their pets and settled into the couch for her interview. They found an advertisement for the study and she thought “I really want to do this… If I could tell and help you and that’s going to help someone else down the road then I don’t see any reason not to. It just jumped out at me.” Home from a long day at work, Savanah expressed her appreciation for her new husband and the loving relationship they have built together.

A self-sufficient woman who wants to see her friends happy and healthy, Savanah explored several relationships before she met her ex-partner in her late teens. He worked at her school and was considerably older. She appreciated his maturity and a sense of structure, especially in the wake of a disaster in her family. The relationship was stable for the first few months but took a shocking turn when he suddenly (and falsely) accused her of being unfaithful. “Out of nowhere it was this huge fight… I lived… in an apartment, it was on the second floor. He jumped off the balcony.” A monthly cycle of violence commenced, as both of them sank into substance abuse and she quit school. Savanah faced accusations, lies, withholding of food and other necessities, isolation,
sexual degradation, infidelity, emotional and verbal violence and more. All the while she struggled to gain control over her addiction to various substances, things he lured her back with more than once. She described the relationship as “Ominous. Dark. Very fluidy [sic], you know. I felt like I was constantly drowning, and I just always felt… vulnerable and… like I had mistakes… It’s just bad.” When she became pregnant, Savanah made a difficult decision to have an abortion instead of pursuing adoption after he threatened to take the child.

Savanah found herself in the depths of despair when she met her current husband, and recalls thinking, “Just give me some reason to live because right now I don’t have anything. I’m, I’m used goods or discarded goods. No one wants me, you know [my ex-partner] had made that very clear to me that no one was going to want me afterwards, and no one was going to want a woman who had been a drug addict, had an abortion and all this, had been involved in a robbery, and then… I saw, found [him]. We were living in the same crummy apartment.” They had both experienced abusive relationships, and the night they met they bonded over shared support and understanding. “It was like drinking your first glass of water after being in the desert for a really long time.” She was immediately attracted to his kind, caring, and protective personality and he held her hand while she called her abuser to break up with him and stood by her when she decided to quit drugs and alcohol.

The economy has been hard on this new couple, but Savanah is back in school and pursuing a job she loves. They have the support of their family and Savanah has developed new, healthy social circles with her husband. She beams as she watches him in the kitchen and remembers their wedding. “When I walked down the aisle, it was like
‘oh my God, this is, like, this is what happiness is.’ It’s almost scary because it’s like I, am I allowed to be this happy, you know? [It’s] like who’s going to come and take it, I’m going to fight for it you know! I’ll fight!… I feel very much like a fighter now… I’m going to fight for my happiness.”
Appendix I

Coding Structure and Definitions

Key:

A = Abusive/violent ex-partner

A-C = Abusive Couple (violent relationship)

O = Others (those not involved in violent or nonviolent relationships)

P = Current (nonviolent) partner of interviewee

S-C = Survivor-Couple

S = Survivor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm Model</th>
<th>Sub-Categories</th>
<th>Codes and Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Increases in risks and strengths | **Key changes in abuse**<br>-Abuse (key changes)  
**Changes in context**<br>-S changing context  
**Awareness and motivators**<br>-S increased awareness  
-S transition motivator | **Abuse**: Descriptor of abusive relationship/incident  
**S Changing context**: Change in the environment or conditions surrounding the S that set the stage for change. The context, not the action. Action-oriented changes should be coded as "S transition motivator" |
| Causal Conditions | **S increased awareness**: The S shares a story in which they demonstrate or experience an increased level of awareness about themself or their situation, leading to or supporting transition. A new realization occurs.  
**S Transition motivator**: An action around the S that leads to or inspires the S to move toward, continue, or complete the transition process. Can include escalation in violence, statement by child, etc. The context should be coded as "S changing context". |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Transition from violent to nonviolent relationships</th>
<th>Differentiation and comparison</th>
<th>A-C conditions for continued friendship:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-S-C differentiation and comparison</td>
<td>-S-C differentiation and comparison</td>
<td>Situation, rules or conditions under which the S willingly maintains friendship or goal oriented/positive communication with the A after the relationship is over.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-S wisdom from A-C</td>
<td>-S wisdom from A-C</td>
<td>Continuing struggle: Physical or emotional symptoms that linger after the termination of the negative relationship. Lingering struggles with meso and macro level institutions (not individuals. Those are others-unsupportive) such as the legal system. Situations in which the A and/or their influence lingered after the termination of the relationship.</td>
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<td>Shifting roles</td>
<td>Shifting roles</td>
<td>S-C differentiation and comparison: Statements or illustrators in which the interviewee compares the A-C with the S-C relationship. Stories of the S-C comparing themselves to the A-C. Stories or stories about the S-C reminding itself that this is an S-C relationship and not an A-C relationship.</td>
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<td>-A-C conditions for continued friendship</td>
<td>-A-C conditions for continued friendship</td>
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<td>-S feels isolated from S community/resources</td>
<td>-S feels isolated from S community/resources</td>
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<td>-S get kids out</td>
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<td>-S help others</td>
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<td>Later smoothness and struggles</td>
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<td>-Continuing struggle</td>
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<td>-S smooth/prompt transition to S-C</td>
<td>-S smooth/prompt transition to S-C</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S feels isolated from S community/resources</td>
<td>S feels isolated from S community/resources: Doesn't feel like an S, doesn't want to feel like an S, doesn't want to identify as S, feels major differences between self and other Ss, seeking different transitionary support after getting out because no long like the other Ss receiving services,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S get kids out</td>
<td>S get kids out</td>
<td>S takes action that moves their kids out of the abusive situation/context or help them stop the cycle of abuse. This includes attempting a safe shelter/space/time within a risky situation. Includes desires, concerns and plans regarding limiting the impact on the children.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S Help others</td>
<td>S Help others</td>
<td>S expresses a desire to help others who have been, or are being, abused. S expresses a desire to help others who have been, or are being, abused. Help outreach professionals working with those experiencing abuse, or who have experienced it in the past.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S smooth/prompt transition to S-C:</strong></td>
<td>S notes that the transition, or parts of it, into the new relationship was relatively easy, smooth, or did not have concerns beyond that of other new relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S wisdom from A-C:</strong></td>
<td>Wisdom or insight gained from having been in an A-C. Includes about finding new partners, about Ss or As, or about A-Cs and S-Cs in general.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Microsystemic conditions</td>
<td>Abuser and Abuser-Couple</td>
<td>Partner and Survivor-Couple</td>
<td>Important others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>-A-C background</td>
<td>-P offers support</td>
<td>-O – supportive</td>
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<td>-A-C communication</td>
<td>-P trait-static</td>
<td>-O – unsupportive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-A-C sugar coated</td>
<td>-P offers protection</td>
<td>-Substance use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-A-C was good</td>
<td>-S-C background</td>
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<td>-A supports S</td>
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<td>-A trait-static</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Abuse (general)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-C background</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-C communication</td>
<td>Statement or illustration pertaining to how the A-C communicated (or failed to communicate), directly or indirectly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-C sugar coated</td>
<td>A-C is talked about in a &quot;sugar coated&quot; way (Ginger - 27), false positive things are said about it. Problems &quot;blown off&quot; (Ginger - 27) or &quot;justified&quot; (Ann - 201) or abuse justified by S taking blame (Savanah 399).</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-C was good</td>
<td>Aspects or moments when the A-C relationship was positive or enjoyable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A supports S</td>
<td>Example of a time when the A offered support to the S while in the A-S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A trait – static</td>
<td>Static trait of the A, not influenced by P, S or others. Long term personality traits, communication style, relevant demographic status, etc. What the A brings into the relationship about her or himself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>Descriptor of abusive relationship/incident</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>O – supportive</td>
<td>Support of any type from specific individuals, groups, deities, media or organizations with an important level of interaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>O – unsupportive</td>
<td>Neutrality or directly unsupportive response from specific individuals, groups, deities, media or organizations with an important level of interaction</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **P offers support:** | Instance or statement of partner offering support to the S: emotional, financial or similar. In case of support in handling a threat, use "P offers protection to S"

| **P trait – static:** | Static trait of the partner, not influenced by interviewee. Long term personality traits, communication style, relevant demographic status, etc.

| **S-C background:** | History of the S-C. How they met, how they became a relationship, etc.

| **P offers protection to S:** | P of S after A offers protection from A, including buffering/assisting with continuing struggles taking the form of ongoing threats from A to S or S's children.

<p>| <strong>Substance use:</strong> | Incident of substance use by S, P, A or O |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrosystemic conditions</th>
<th>Partners’ histories</th>
<th>A background: History/biography of the abuser as an individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervening Conditions</td>
<td>- A background</td>
<td>Compare with others’ relationship: Compares current relationship with others' - for grounding, differentiation, support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- P background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- S background</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- S trait</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture and comparisons</td>
<td>- Compare with others’ relationship</td>
<td>Cultural expectation: Expressions of perceived or directly communicated expectations at the meso or macro level. These may relate to the nature of relationships, gender, aging, financial management etc. or other broad demographic status. Religious context is included here.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Cultural expectation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- S-C external support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External negative events</td>
<td>- External negative events</td>
<td>External negative event: Event/situation not directly related to the abusive relationship, not a symptom or contributor to the abuse. Health concerns (not due to abusive injury/harm), crime victimization at the hands of others, death in the family, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| P background: Partner's background and personal history. |

| S-C external support: Supportive people, organizations, traditions, cultural expectations, processes, benefit of aging, etc., (micro through macro) that are general to all relationships, and not specific to S-C. Can include the removal or cessation of the above. |

| S background: S's background and personal history from before either relationship. |

<p>| S trait – static: static trait of the survivor, not influenced by P, A or others. Long term personality traits, communication style, relevant demographic status, etc. What the S brings into the relationship about her or himself. |
|---|---|---|
| <strong>Shifts in communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;-A-C not discussed&lt;br&gt;-S share abuse story (after not discussing)&lt;br&gt;-S focus on S-C&lt;br&gt;-S-C communication | <strong>Exceptional acts</strong>&lt;br&gt;-S share abuse story (to break isolate, seek help)&lt;br&gt;-S increase education&lt;br&gt;-S increase network for assistance&lt;br&gt;-S increase power external to A-C&lt;br&gt;-S agency in A-C or recovery | <strong>S benefits/recovers solo:</strong> S shares about experiencing the positive value of time alone, single or outside of a committed romantic relationship in the time between the A-C and S-C. |
| <strong>Single-hood</strong>&lt;br&gt;-S benefits/recovers solo&lt;br&gt;-S celebrates/explores being out of the A-C&lt;br&gt;-S individual coping mechanism&lt;br&gt;-S solo sexuality | <strong>Focus on S-C:</strong> S tries to focus on how good this relationship is instead of thinking about the past. |
| <strong>S Increase education:</strong> S moved into increase their formal education through trainings, reading, or a return to school. | <strong>S Increase network for assistance:</strong> S sought help from others, or developed relationships that later became helpful (intended or not). Broke isolation regarding abuse, yielding (or in hopes of) assistance with the transition. |
| <strong>S increase power external to A-C:</strong> S promotions, better pay, or other methods of gaining power external to the relationship. Meso system power increases. Put increasing education in &quot;S increase education&quot; if it is about individual enrichment. Unit may be listed under both codes. | <strong>S-C communication:</strong> Communication style and illustrators. Statements conveying the role of communication in the relationship. |</p>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S agency in A-C or recovery:</strong> The S illustrates or states the power or ability to make a change, assert a desire, set a boundary, or otherwise move toward a desired goal. Can include &quot;S - Get Kids Out&quot; taking action to try to move their kids out of the abusive situation/context or help them stop the cycle of abuse. NOT used for S-Cs, as this is the norm there or becomes the norm through “continuing struggle”</td>
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<td><strong>S individual coping mechanism:</strong> A way in which the S tries to deal with a negative situation by her or himself.</td>
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<td><strong>S share abuse story:</strong> S shares a story about, or comments on the role of, telling others about abuse</td>
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