

**INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES  
VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF ATTACHMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the suitability of using Bowlby's attachment theory as a lens to study intimate partner violence. Extant data from thirty couples self-reporting violence in their relationship, was used. Individual audiotaped interviews from a study unrelated to attachment were transcribed. Ten interviews (five couples) were selected for coding. Applying the modified analytic induction method, as outlined by Gilgun, the data fell into thematic categories that provided a foundation for a narrative about each dyadic system. Representative constructs such as internal working models, adult attachment, caregiving, automatic arousal and abandonment, emerged naturally from the data. The iterative nature of the methodology demanded continual refinement and refocusing. The participants' words painted the picture of violence in their relationship. Direct quotes authenticated the research and gave it an experiential aspect. Results demonstrated that attachment theory is an excellent lens through which to study intimate partner violence, suggesting it be embraced in future family systems research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is the product of the gentle, encouraging support of my academic advisor, clinic supervisor, and committee chair, Karen Rosen, Ed.D. Her genuine interest in her students is the gift she offers all who study with her, but I understood it as a trust, and that is what would not let me stop short of my goal. Although I suspect she always had a master structure for this thesis in mind, I wrote and she patiently edited, until I found a path through the maze for myself. As with all master teachers, she allowed her student to uncover the answers and gladly shared the thrill of those moments. She never rushed the process of creating this paper, and seemed to delight in my reporting each insight. I thank her for being flexible, so attuned to her student, and so respectfully open to differences.

Karen introduced me to a research method that not only offered me the best platform to describe my data, but required that I repeatedly reanalyze and use the actual language of the volunteers to validate my findings. The process of continually revisiting the data, uncovering new meanings, was a little like fitting a puzzle together, but not knowing what the final picture would actually look like. The modified analytic inductive method allowed me to directly pour the drama of each couples' conflict into the thesis itself. Karen put me in touch with a methodology to explore relational variables using my own analytic and positivistic outlook to advantage. Her trust in my commitment, and her exhaustive editing made this a successful collaboration.

I want to also thank my talented committee: Sandra Stith, Ph.D., the director of our program and a scholar of note in the field of intimate violence, took time from her considerable responsibilities this summer to edit the final pages of my thesis. With no time

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