

**Understanding Female Aggression  
In Situationally Violent Relationships:  
A Qualitative Study**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to gather information about female aggression in situationally violent relationship. The interviews and surveys of four African-American couples were coded and analyzed to gather information about the impact of female aggression on the relationship, the contextual factors surrounding female aggression, and the motivations for female aggression.

The results indicated that female aggression impacts the couple relationship in several ways. First, female aggression is typically minimized by both partners. Another impact on the relationship is that it leads to further escalation of aggression, as well as leading the couple to question their commitment to each other. Female aggression also appeared to become part of the couples struggle for power. The study also identified substance abuse and a family history of abuse as two of the contextual factors present with female aggression. The motives for female aggression that were identified included frustration, wanting control over the relationship, abandonment and retribution. One couple identified self-defense as a motivation for female aggression. Implications for future research and for clinical practice are offered.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### The Problem and its Setting

Female aggression towards a partner is a critical problem which hasn't received as much research attention as has male violence. Traditionally, women were viewed as the victims of domestic violence, or intimate partner violence (IPV); assault was committed against them by male batterers, who would perpetuate the violence in a cycle where acts of aggression were followed by periods of relative calm. This view led to the formation of services for battered women which were developed primarily for women who were being physically abused by male partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In cases when female aggression occurred, it was considered to be in the course of self defense, or due to a woman being fearful of her partner (Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Morse, 1995). However, results from various studies have shown that often times women are as aggressive towards their male partners as vice versa (Archer, 2000). The National Family Violence Survey, found that out of 6,002 men and women, 11.6% of husbands reported using violence against their wives as compared to 12.4% of wives against their husbands (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Female aggression can be harmful not only to the partner at whom the violence is directed, but to the woman herself if her partner retaliates against her. Women are more likely than men to suffer serious injury and harm when men commit violence against them than when women commit violence against men (Cascardi, Langhinrichsen, & Vivian, 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). More needs to be understood about female aggression and the impact it has on the couple relationship as well as what motivates a woman to commit violence against her male partner.

Recent data has suggested that violence in IPV is often bidirectional, used by both partners against each other, which has led to two different camps of beliefs. One camp includes those who view the violence as committed against women by men in order to retain power and control in a patriarchal society (Dasgupta, 1999) ; the other camp includes those who believe that women may have a larger role to play in the cycle of violence (Johnson, 1995). One reason the data supporting the two camps of beliefs was so radically divergent was that different types of populations were being studied, and different types of assessments used to gather the information (Johnson, 1995). Michael Johnson (1995) formulated a theory which helped to explain the discrepancy in the data being gathered. He argued that there were four categories of violence that partners experience in their relationship with each other: intimate terrorism (IT), violent resistance, mutual violent control, and situational couple violence. Violent resistance refers to relationships when one partner, usually the female, is violent but not controlling while the partner is both violent and controlling; this occurs when a woman uses violence to protect herself from her partners' physical abuse. Mutual violent control refers to relationships where both partners are violent and controlling. Intimate terrorism (IT) is often gender asymmetrical, where the violence is committed primarily by one gender, usually men against women; the IT, violent resistance and mutual violent control categories are most often found in data gathered from shelters and treatment programs. In the IT category one partner will attempt to gain control over the other through violent and nonviolent ways; there tends to be a higher risk of violence escalating from mild to severe. The final category Johnson identified is situational couples violence (SCV) which is often seen in surveys given by family researchers; this category of IPV is situational and isn't part of a pattern of control

and dominance. The violence rarely escalates, and is often times gender symmetrical, where the violence is committed by both partners equally (Johnson, 1995).

Currently the SCV category is believed to account for the majority of the IPV being committed in the general public, and is the type of violence where men and women frequently exhibit equal amounts of violence. Studies on female aggression don't usually differentiate between Johnson's different categories; as a result, data which indicates that women aggress primarily due to self-defense or fear, may be based on data gathered from IT populations (Johnson, 2006).

Rosen, Stith, Few and Daly (2005) conducted a study of 15 heterosexual couples of which 11 were labeled as SCV. The study included descriptions of the couple level motivations and relationship contexts of the couples who fit into the four classified categories identified by Johnson, and it explored the differences between those categories. While the study touched on contextual factors and motivations that could affect female aggression against their partner in SCV relationships, it didn't explore the effect those contextual factors and motivations have on the couple relationship. There is a lack of research that focuses on the impact female aggression has on the couple relationship. This study attempts to address that gap by exploring more fully the impact female aggression has on the relationship in couples who fit into a SCV category by further analyzing the data gathered by Rosen and her colleagues (2005).

Following the theory that there are different categories of violence, and that in cases of SCV, women are as likely to initiate and commit the violence as their male partners, it seems that more needs to be understood about situationally violent relationships. Much of the research offered doesn't differentiate IPV into different types.

Instead, the research seems to focus more on the type characterized as IT, where men are more aggressive and the violence escalates; the information being gathered from this population is being generalized to all types of violence (Johnson, 2006). Studies have suggested that women have used violence in self-defense in order to protect themselves against abuse, in retaliation for previous abuse, and to escape the violence (Barnett, Lee, & Thelen, 1997; Hamberger, 1997). Such findings may not give an accurate picture of female aggression if it is based on data gathered only from IT populations. The motivation is addressed as occurring in a context of women's victimization and powerlessness (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Swan & Snow, 2006). The motivations for women to commit violence in SCV could be different than those who commit violence in cases of IT; understanding the context in which women aggress in SCV could help us to understand SCV in general, as well as provide information on factors on which other research could focus.

As awareness of IPV against women and its impact on society increased, more states passed and enforced mandatory arrest policies with regards to domestic disturbances. An unintended result was the increase in the number of women who are arrested and prosecuted for the violence they have perpetuated on their partner. As a result, women are being mandated to attend therapy programs that were originally designed with male perpetrators in mind. Current treatment programs are not considered appropriate to treat the majority of women who are in them (Dowd, 2001). Services that are available may be based on the assumption that there are similar dynamics in the way men and women commit violence against each other (Capaldi & Gorman-Smith, 2003). Clearly, this lack of information on appropriate ways to treat women needs to be addressed. We need to

understand the context in which the violence occurs, as well as what motivates women to commit the violence. Subsequently, the information gathered could be used to modify treatment programs so that they are more appropriate to treat the needs of aggressive females. More information needs to be gathered about female aggression which differentiates the IPV into the different categories.

### Rationale for Study

Research indicates that a large percentage of couple violence is situational, and has the potential to be bidirectional, falling into the SCV category suggested by Johnson (2006). Understanding the impact female aggression has on the relationship in couples who fall into the SCV category, as well as exploring the motivation and context of female aggression as perceived by both partners who fit into the SCV category will add to research on several levels. First, it will provide more information to the topic of female aggression which currently appears to be primarily based on information gathered from treatment programs and shelters (Hamberger, 1997; Swan & Snow, 2002). Such research indicates that women commit violence in the context of being victimized by male partners (Swan & Snow, 2006). In this study I focus on understanding the context of female aggression within couples where the woman is the primary physical aggressor against her partner.

Second, understanding how both partners perceive the motivation behind the aggression exhibited by the female could provide information on the couple relationship. Furthermore, information could be gathered on how that violence transforms and is transformed by the relationship as well as the contextual factors in the relationship that may impact female aggression. For example, knowing whether the woman was motivated

to aggress in an effort to protect herself versus trying to control her partner could lead to better interventions being designed that not only treat the individual, but also treat the couple more effectively. The contextual factors identified through the exploration of both partners' narratives could provide clinicians with greater awareness of what to assess when couples come in to therapy. Also, as a family therapist, understanding the influence violence has on the pattern of interaction could lead to better treatment planning and different interventions being used with aggressive SCV couples.

The current study will increase our understanding of the SCV category of violence which may be the type most often seen by family therapists. Research suggests that there is diversity even within the SCV typology which needs to be explored further (Rosen et al., 2005). Within the eleven SCV couples studied by Rosen and colleagues, there appeared to be a difference in the motivation the couples had for aggressing. Some couples exhibited instrumental motivation, where the couple attempted to gain control of the relationship through each argument, and others exhibited a more expressive type of violence, where aggression was exhibited suddenly when an argument heated up (Rosen et al., 2005). To completely understand the participants' experiences in their relationships, and to gather a rich and full picture of the interactions that are occurring, I will use qualitative methods. The open ended answers given to the questions asked in qualitative studies allow me to understand the world as seen by the participants (Patton, 2002). The study that Rosen et al. (2005) conducted provides data that I can utilize to explore the topic of female aggression and its impact on the relationship. Their study is unique in that it explores the different categories such as intimate terrorism and situational violence from the perspective

of both partners. It offers me a chance to study the stories the participants tell, to make sense of the information given by analyzing and interpreting their words.

Finally, there is a lack in research which includes data from both partners, which doesn't make sense when studying bidirectional violence (Straus, 2006). How else can we understand the relationship context without understanding both sides of the violence? The only study found which gathered data from both partners and also differentiated between categories of violence was conducted by Rosen et al. (2005). By further analyzing the data gathered in that study, this study will add to the research that utilizes information from both partners. No other study has analyzed this data in this way.

### Theoretical Framework

General Systems theory and Phenomenology are two frameworks that guide the current study. Systems theory focuses on the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; individuals belong in multiple systems, such as the couple relationship, the family, and society. To fully understand something, you not only have to look at the individual, but look at how that individual interacts within and among all the other systems (Nichol & Schwartz, 1994). To do so, a systems theorist moves away from a linear cause and effect notion; they focus more on the "how" or "what" of a situation rather than the "why". Whereas a feminist theorist would see a domestic violence situation as an example of a male dominated society that focuses on power and dominance, a systems theorist may focus on the context in which that violence occurred. They may take a non-blaming stance towards the individuals involved in a domestic violence situation in an effort to fully understand the context in which the violence takes place. This theory has been criticized in the past for absolving men of the responsibility in their part in the violence and for

blaming the woman. Yet, perhaps as a result of this criticism, general systems theory has evolved to a point that where it is appropriate to use with this research. One such change is that family therapy is not used in cases of severe violence, and is only deemed appropriate in cases of mild-to moderate violence (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). Another change is the belief that even with a non blaming stance, the aggressor must be held fully responsible for their part in the violence (Anderson & Schlossberg, 1999).

General systems theory helps us understand the interactional patterns and styles of communication that occur between couples as they try to handle problem and navigate the stresses in their lives. One study shows us that one way violent couples differ from non violent couples is their level of positive communication skills and problem-solving styles (Margolin & Burmin, 1993). Systems theory helps us to understand the context in which women aggress towards men; their violence can only be understood by examining the relational context that exists. Whereas research gathered from women who appeared to be in severe violent relationships find that the women commit violence in order to defend themselves, or due to being fearful of their partners, what about women who initiate the violence, or who are in mild to moderate violent relationships? Systems theory helps to examine and understand the pattern of interaction that occurs in SCV to understand the female to male aggression being studied, as well as helping to understand the multiple contexts that could be influencing that pattern of interaction.

Phenomenology is a framework which suggests that the phenomena being studied holds different meanings for different people and that the reality people perceive is based on their unique perspectives and interpretations (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). Furthermore, the relationship that exists between family members and couples should be

viewed in the context of how each individual defines him or herself in that relationship. The assumptions of phenomenology include the idea that any experience that occurs will mean different things to different people; a statement made by a partner may be seen as harmless by one, but a provocation by the other. To get a full idea of what happens, multiple views must be sought out in order to fully understand the situation being studied. Another assumption is that both the people being interviewed and the interviewers are experts; couples describing the situation are giving us answers to the research questions that may or may not agree with the hypothesis. Finally, as phenomenological researchers, we attempt to capture the “whole” by interviewing both partners in the couple so as to understand the couple relationship.

The data gathered in this phenomenological research doesn't have the purpose of being generalized to other couples; it is mainly an opportunity to accurately understand the experience of couples who have experienced mild-to-moderate violence and where the woman is an aggressor. The questions are asked in order to find the meanings that people give to their actions, and how they express those actions within the relational context (Boss et al., 1996).

#### Purpose of the study

The goal of this project is to understand how female aggression affects the couple in situationally violent relationships and to understand the motivations the women use for aggressing against their male partner. Much of the information gathered in the past on female aggression either seems to be based on research where there is no differentiation on the category of violence being studied, or where the information is gathered from people who fit into the IT category. We seek to understand the perceptions women have about

their motivation to aggress, and the impact the aggression has on their interactions with their partners. Moreover, I explore the perceptions their partners have of the female aggression and how that impacts their interactions. Having a deeper understanding of the motivation behind and impact of female aggression in SCV from more than one perspective will add to the research on both SCV and on female aggression. Due to possible differences in motivation behind men's and women's violence and the impact of female vs. male violence, interventions based on information gathered about male aggressors may not be helpful with female aggressors. The main research questions include:

- 1) How does female aggression affect the couple relationship?
- 2) What contextual factors have an impact on the aggression?
- 3) What are the perceptions of each partner in the SCV relationship about the motivations behind the female partner aggression toward her male partner?

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Brief overview of IPV*

IPV has typically been seen as a problem committed by men against women, usually in an attempt to control and have power over female partners. It has been frequently argued that when women commit violence, it is generally in self-defense, whereas men commit violence in order to control and dominate their female partners (James, 1999). Such a view is supported by feminist researchers who believe that domestic violence occurs in a context where women are victims and are powerless to put a stop to the abuse. An influential theory shows the progression as a cycle of violence, which starts from a tension building stage, where there is a breakdown of communication as the abuser starts to get angry and which leads to an incident where violence could occur. This is followed by a calm/making up period, where the abuser apologizes and promises that the abuse would never happen again. Such a cycle can occur hundreds of times throughout the relationship and can differ from relationship to relationship (Walker, 1984).

However, another perspective, one which is generally supported by family researchers, theorizes that intimate partner violence (IPV) may be perpetuated equally by men and women. The first and second National Family Violence surveys, which gathered the data from large representative samples, indicated that generally women and men are equally violent with their partners (Straus & Gelles, 1986). Both surveys, as well as numerous other studies which support this perspective and have usually utilized the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) to measure IPV, have findings which appear to show that both men and women are as likely to be victims as perpetrators in domestic disputes (Melton & Belknap, 2003). Family researchers theorize that the violence is bidirectional,

coming from both partners, and needs to be conceptualized as a family problem rather than a wife beating problem (Melton & Belknap, 2003).

There has been criticism by feminist researchers of the theories put forth by family researchers that range from the way the research is obtained to the idea that men and women can be responsible for their part in the family violence cycle. One criticism is that the CTS does not take into account the context in which the violence occurs; women could initiate the violence in self defense or due to feeling fearful of their partner, factors which aren't taken into account when conducting research with the CTS (Melton & Belknap, 2003). Another criticism is that bidirectional violence implies the violence being committed in IPV is equal; it doesn't take into account that there are different consequences for men and women when violence is used against them (Dasgupta, 1999). Physically, men tend to be stronger than women, and as a result, there is a higher chance of a female partner being injured, and for the injuries to be more severe when he aggresses against her than vice versa. A woman is more likely to be injured and has a higher risk of hospitalization than a man does in IPV situations (Cascardi et al, 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

One explanation for the contradiction between these two theories has focused on the different populations surveyed and ways the data has been gathered. In an attempt to bridge the gap between these two camps of thought Johnson (1995), moved beyond the idea that the data collected by one camp was erroneous. Most of the research that conceptualized IPV as occurring within the context of power and control was gathered from men in court ordered treatment programs and women in domestic violence shelters (Johnson, 1995; Morse, 1995). Research that supported the theory of gender symmetry in

IPV was based on information gathered in community and national samples (Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Johnson asserted that there were four different forms of IPV which he based on the severity and the nature of the abuse: mutual violent control, violent resistance, intimate terrorism, and situational couple violence. The first, mutual violent control refers to relationships where both partners attempt to control each other through violent and nonviolent means. The second, violent resistance describes a pattern where one partner, usually the woman, tries to fight against her partners' attempt to control her; in this category, the female partner primarily aggresses in order to defend herself, or due to being fearful of her partner. Third is intimate terrorism (IT), which is typically committed against women by a male partner and is the form that escalates into life-threatening violence; this is the common perception of IPV, where the male partner is the perpetrator, and the violence will escalate from mild to severe violence. Typically when one partner exhibits IT, the other is more apt to exhibit violent resistance. The motivation to commit violence in IT is believed to be due to wanting control and power over the partner who is being abused (Johnson, 1995). The first three categories of IPV described tend to be found within the court ordered treatment programs shelter populations. The final category of IPV, situational violence, is a result of day to day frustrations, is committed by both partners, and rarely escalates into serious violence, although it may escalate to mild and moderate violence. Those who belong in this category tend to be found in the community and national samples that family researchers study, and are not as likely to be referred from court ordered or shelter populations (Johnson, 1995).

This study will focus on SCV because it is the most common form of IPV in the general population. The majority of the research focuses on IPV within the court ordered

and shelter populations which tend to have higher numbers of people who fit into the mutual violent control, violent resistance, and IT categories. Although there has been a movement in the IPV field which has led to the formation of IPV categories, there is still much debate over the validity of this theory. Therefore, a number of studies don't recognize these different IPV categories, and lump all forms of IPV as occurring in a context of female victimization and male power and control. Thus, there is a scarcity of data which differentiates between different categories of violence, and moreover, a lack of data which focuses on couples who exhibit situational couple violence. As a result, there aren't any studies to date which focus on the impact SCV can have on the relationship.

#### *Gender symmetry and female aggression*

Studies utilizing community samples have indicated that women are as likely to engage in relationship violence against their partners as are men (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Women have been found to commit equal amounts of verbal and emotional aggression against partners (Straus & Sweet, 1992). In multiple community surveys across Canada and the US, as many women admitted to using violent behaviors as men, although only a small number admitted to using serious violence (Tutty, 1999). These studies support the idea of female aggression towards male partners, an idea which has become a controversial topic within the IPV field. Since, in general, men are believed to be more aggressive than women, it requires a thinking shift from women being only victims to also being perpetrators (Eagley & Steffen, 1986). Even though all types of abuse can be destructive, the controversy over gender symmetry mainly appears to be over the use of physical violence in relationships rather than emotional or verbal abuse (Straus, 1997).

Two national surveys, in addition to countless studies, support the view that frequently, women are as likely to commit violence against a male partner as men are towards a female one (Archer, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1990). One survey, utilizing the CTS, was the 1975 National Family Violence Survey which found that women committed minor and severe relationship aggression as often as men (Straus et al., 1980). Another survey, The National Family Violence Survey, also utilized the CTS, and in 1985 affirmed the data gathered in the first survey; out of 6,002 men and women, 12.4% of the women reported using violence against their husbands vs. 11.6% of men against their wives (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Archer (2000) conducted a meta-analysis review of 82 studies which indicated that slightly more women than men reported using violence in their relationship.

Part of the debate about female aggression towards male partners is that instruments such as the CTS don't take into account the context of the IPV situation (Dasgupta, 1999). An example is a woman who in an effort to defend herself may inflict bruises on her partner, while she ends up with broken bones. With a limited understanding of the circumstances surrounding the behaviors, the motivations for the violence, and the consequences of that violence, there is concern that an attempt to find gender symmetry detracts from the dangers a woman could face (Dowd, 2001). Women could be physically violent in order to defend themselves or due to feeling fearful about their partner, and it doesn't seem appropriate to put them in the same category as an abuser who had deliberately inflicted harm on a partner in order to control or dominate (Straus, 1997). A fear is that viewing the violence as equal may lead to inappropriate levels of response as a result; a woman who committed IPV as a result of self-defense might end up facing

harsher penalties than her partner. Another concern is that focusing on female aggression could take away from the harm that has been committed on women by men, which has led to the formation and funding of needed services such as shelters (Dowd, 2001, Straus & Gelles, 1990). As a result, research on female aggressors has been underdeveloped, and the violence women commit against male partners minimized.

Although national surveys indicate that a higher amount of men than expected are being physically aggressed against by their female partners, there hasn't been a corresponding increase in the amount of men who are seeking help from shelters. Part of this could be due to the lack of seriousness such a claim may be given; violence by women is perceived less negatively than violence by men, which may lead to fewer men making claims (Tutty, 1999). Another reason could be that due to physical gender differences there tend to be fewer injuries in female-to-male IPV than male-to-female (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

As more states pass pro-arrest policies, where in cases of IPV, the police arrest and charge the perpetrator, there has been an increase not only in the number of men arrested, but an increase of women arrested for domestic violence against their partners (Martin, 1997). This has led to women being mandated to attend treatment programs that are designed primarily for male perpetrators, which may not be appropriate to treat the type of violence committed by women. For example, a theory is that women commit violence in order to defend themselves rather than in an effort to exert some sort of control over their partner (Swan, 2001). Treatment programs for aggressors tend to focus on the power and control dynamics of the relationship, which may not be applicable to the woman referred there who aggressed in self-defense.

In sum, research suggests that women are as likely to be the aggressive partner in the relationship as men; however, there is more available research on men's violence (Archer, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1986). The majority of research which does focus on female aggression draws from shelter and court populations, where often-times women commit IPV in order to defend themselves from their partner or due to being fearful of their partner. There is a scarcity of data which focuses on female aggression in the SCV category and moreover, a lack of information on how that aggression impacts the couple relationship. Therefore, one focus of this study is to gather information about female aggression in situationally violent couples.

#### *Contextual factors for female aggression*

Swan and Snow (2002) collected information from 108 female aggressors which examined different types and severities of abuse and gathered information about the context in which the violence was committed. The majority of the women were recruited from a public health clinic; the rest were recruited from family violence programs and a domestic violence shelter. Information was gathered using the CTS-2 and items of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI); the women assessed their own behavior, and then their partners' behavior. The results were used to identify different categories of relationships: women as victims, women as aggressors, and mixed relationships with either mixed male coercive, or mixed female coercive. Even though most of the women in the study had physically aggressed at least once against their partner, in 34% of the cases, the partner committed more violence against them, putting them in the victim category; the aggressor category, where women commit more violence, accounted for 12% of the participants. The rest of the women were split between the mixed-male

coercive category, where the woman committed greater or equal violence, and her partner was more coercive (32%) and the mixed-female coercive category, where the partner is more violent and the women more coercive (19%). Coercion refers to times when nonphysical ways, such as trying to isolate a partner or using finances to control a partner's decision, were used to maintain control.

This study demonstrated that it was important to understand women's violence by understanding the context of violence against women by their male partners; even though all the women in the study were aggressive towards their partner, about a third of them were classified as victims. The women self reported equal amounts of verbal and emotional abuse as compared to their partners, and committed a higher amount of moderate violence such as pushing and shoving than their partners did against them. However, the women in the study were more often the victims of serious types of abuse, such as sexual violence, that caused them terror (Swan & Snow, 2002). Even in cases where the woman was classified as an aggressor, without having information assessing her partners' level of fear towards her, it is unknown if she would have fit into the category of IT as formulated by Johnson (1995).

This study was later used by Swan and Snow (2006) to help develop a theory of how women aggress in IPV. The theoretical framework suggests that when women aggress against their partner, it is in the context of violence being committed against them by male partners. Within this model all types of abuse are included since focusing only on the physical abuse doesn't take into account the impact other types of abuse may have had on the relationship; a woman who is being sexually coerced may react physically against her partner. Also, understanding the woman's relationship history, child and adult abuse

history, motivations for using abuse, coping strategies used to handle relationship problems and the context of race, gender, and socio economic status is considered important in getting a fuller, more comprehensive picture of female aggression. Their model predicted that higher levels of childhood trauma would predict greater use of female aggression and victimization. Other contextual factors include substance use, PTSD, and mood disorders such as depression.

Another study which examined contextual factors was conducted by Dowd, Leisring, and Rosenbaum (2005) and focused on partner aggressive women. The authors evaluated 107 domestically violent women who were referred to an anger management program. They indicated that certain characteristics many of the women shared included a history of disruption of social supports in childhood and adulthood, a tendency to be of low socio-economic status, and the likelihood of young motherhood. The women in the sample also reported high level of chronic substance abuse, trauma symptoms, and mental illnesses. Given the different types of stressors that were present among the sample population, the study speculated the women may have difficulty coping with lives that were highly stressful, which could have an impact on the aggressiveness displayed by the women. The study also indicated that the high rates of the stressors were greater within this sample population than are found in the general population.

Other contextual factors that could have an impact in female-to-male violence are characteristics and attributes of both men and women. Hyoun Kim and Deborah Capaldi's (2004) study examined the impact depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior had on an individuals' level of aggression towards their partner. They also examined the influence a partners' depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior had on an individuals' aggression

towards that partner. The participants surveyed were 79 couples gathered from a community-based longitudinal study where the participants were at risk for delinquency. The data were gathered through self-report questionnaires and interviews of both partners, as well as a series of discussion tasks which were recorded. The authors found that antisocial behavior and depressive symptoms of the men in the study did not have a significant effect on the physical and psychological aggression women exhibited, but that they were a predictor of male aggression towards a partner. A man with depressive symptoms may be more aggressive to his partner, and according to this study, his symptoms wouldn't impact her aggression. The study also suggested that a woman's depressive symptoms were a significant predictor for physical and psychological aggression committed against her; the partner of a woman with depressive symptoms may be more likely to be aggressive towards her. Women's depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior were found to be a predictor of aggression towards their partner. The study suggests that depressive symptoms in women impact the couple relationship more negatively than when the male partner exhibits the same symptoms. This could be due to the theory that relationships where the wife is depressed exhibit less positive communication styles than when men are depressed (Kim & Capaldi, 2004).

Similarly, a study conducted by Ridley and Feldman (2003) investigated the association between communication styles, patterns, and outcomes and female aggression towards partners. The authors recruited 153 female volunteers from a public health clinic to discover more information about the frequency and severity of their use of female aggression within the context of the relationship. Based on the self-reported information, the results indicated that relationships where there was female aggression present had a

significant association with conflict-based communication styles. When compared with non-violent relationships, relationships with female aggression present were more likely to exhibit male and female verbal aggression, poorer resolution of problems, and more destructive communication patterns. There was a wide range of measurements given, however, the ones used in this study to measure female aggression towards their partners as well as relationship distress included: Abusive Behavior Inventory (ABI), the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ), and the Marital Opinion Questionnaire (MOQ). The study provided support that communication patterns play an equally important role in female IPV as male IPV. However, those communication patterns need to be understood on a deeper level, and information needs to be gathered from both partners so as to gather a fuller picture.

To fully understand the context in which female aggression occurs, information needs to be gathered from both partners. Most studies typically collect information from only one member of a couple primarily due to financial cost and time constraints (Armstrong, Wernke, Medina, & Schafer, 2002). In a review of existing literature which focused on the occurrence of IPV in the relationship, the authors selected fifteen studies from peer-reviewed journals found in the Psych-info database; each study was independently categorized by two of the authors. They divided the studies into categories where the researchers found either agreement or disagreement between partners over the occurrence of IPV. Armstrong et al. (2002) found that 10 of those studies suggested that the couples will disagree on whether IPV occurs in their relationship; the other five indicated significant partner agreement over the occurrence of some levels of IPV. The review suggests that people are more honest about their responses if they knew it was

being checked against their partners' response, and that relying on only one person for information about IPV may not provide enough information (Armstrong et al, 2002).

At this point, there is a lack of information which has focused on understanding female aggression from the viewpoint of both partners.

According to the previously discussed studies, some of the contextual factors that may have an impact on female aggression include acting in self-defense or being afraid of their partner (Snow & Swan, 2002). Dowd et al. (2005) discussed factors such as substance abuse, trauma symptoms, and stressors such as young parenthood and low socio economic status. Furthermore, depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior exhibited by women impacted female aggression towards male partners (Kim & Capaldi, 2004). Finally, Kim and Capaldi (2004) and Ridley and Feldman (2003) suggest that the communication style and pattern between the couple has an impact on female aggression; the communication pattern is more likely to be conflictual and destructive when there is female aggression present. This study will explore if any of these factors are brought up by the couple as having an impact on female aggression.

A majority of the research exploring contextual factors which impact female aggression has gathered information from women who are in clinical and court populations. This may indicate that these women are in more severely violent relationships, and wouldn't fit into the SCV category that Johnson identified. Furthermore, some of these studies only gathered the information from one partner in the relationship; to fully understand the couple relationship when there is female aggression, both partners need to tell their stories. Finally, more needs to be understood about female aggression which occurs in SCV relationships, where the violence is mild to moderate, and there is a

decreased chance of court involvement. Fully understanding the contextual factors present when IPV occurs in situationally violent relationships could lead to better assessment and treatment interventions that therapists could utilize. This study will gather information from both partners about the contextual factors present in the relationship which may have impacted female aggression.

#### *Motivations behind female aggression*

The majority of studies cite self defense as the primary reason women aggress against a partner. Women were more likely than the men to use violence to defend themselves from direct physical attack, to escape from attack or to retaliate for prior physical and emotional abuse, whereas men used violence mostly to dominate and control their partner (Barnett, Lee, and Thelen, 1997; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin, 1997). In the Barnett et al. (1997) study, 34 men who were arrested for physically assaulting their spouse, and 30 women from a battered women's shelter were recruited. The participants completed a modified version of the CTS, the Relationship Abuse Questionnaire (RAQ), which has 4 subscales: Verbal, Psychological, Threat, and Physical. These subscales allowed participants to provide information about contextual factors of the abuse. The study found that the frequency of violence that men and women self reported was relatively equal, and that there was little variation among the different forms of violence. There were several motivators that both men and women appeared to attribute their abuse equally to, such as wanting to "let out" the violence, getting the other's attention, showing who was boss, retribution, upsetting the other emotionally, and for teasing. However, a motivator which women were more likely than men to attribute their aggressiveness to was self protection, whereas men were more likely than women to

attribute their abusiveness to motivators such as showing their partner who was boss (Barnett et al., 1997).

Similarly, in another study, Hamberger et al. (1997) categorized the motives of 215 men and 66 women who had been referred to attend a domestic violence program. Each participant completed an intake interview where information about past exposure to childhood and adult abuse was examined. The authors' study indicated that the women in the study were more likely to have motives related to self-defense or retaliation for previous abuse. In comparison, the men in the study identified more often with motivators related to control, punishment for behavior, and anger. Other reasons women gave for using aggression were to express feelings, to stop their partners nagging or to get their partner to shut up, or in retaliation for previous abuse (Hamberger et al., 1997).

Furthermore, Hamberger and Guse (2002) conducted a study comparing the experience and impact of IPV on 119 men and 24 women who were court ordered to attend counseling, and 50 women who were in a shelter. Information was gathered through a structured clinical interview and responses to a modified version of the CTS. Overall, women in both groups exhibited more fear and anger towards a violent partner than the men did, and the majority of women indicated that their partner had committed some sort of violence against them (Hamberger & Guse, 2002). The men indicated more amusement at their partners' initiation of violence, and were more likely to exhibit controlling behaviors towards them.

This amusement towards a partner could be a motivator that has an impact on relationship. Provocation is a motivator that elicits aggression, and which can help escalate it; it occurs in conditions where someone is intentionally frustrated or feels as if

they are being attacked. Bettencourt and Miller (1996) found through a meta-analysis of 64 existing research studies, that provocation impacts men and women differently. While men are typically more aggressive than women, when there is provocation, their study found that the gender differences in aggression are reduced (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). Furthermore, women may be more likely to be provoked through verbal insults than through physical instigations (White, 1994). Women also differ from men in their appraisals of danger and in their assessment of the degree to which a situation might evoke dangerous retaliation. Men may be more aggressive in “neutral” situations, because they are more apt to interpret ambiguous situations as provoking (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996).

Overall, there appears to be a difference in what motivates men and women to commit IPV against their partner. However, most of the information on motivators for female aggression is gathered from populations that are court ordered or from shelters, which tend to have larger numbers of IT, mutual violent control, and violent resistance. In studies which sampled from this type of population, both Hamberger and Guse (2002) and Hamberger et al. (1997) found that women often committed IPV in order to protect themselves from their partner and to retaliate for previous abuse. There is a lack of information on what the motivators are for female aggression in situationally violent relationships; the violence is typically mild-to-moderate, and therefore, self-defense may not be as strong a motivator for IPV. However, provocation may be a possible motivator identified in a situationally violent relationship (Bettencourt and Miller, 1996).

The fact remains that a large number of women are initiating and committing violence against male partners (Archer, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1986). With the research provided by Johnson (2005), it appears that many such cases of female aggression occur

within the SCV category; in SCV, the violence being committed is more likely to be bidirectional, and women are as likely as their male partners to be aggressive (Archer, 2000). For several reasons, there needs to be a focus on gathering information which can be used to help women recognize and change their part within the pattern. One reason for doing so is that due to possible physical disparity, a woman may be in danger of being seriously injured if her partner retaliates in kind; even in cases where the woman has initiated, due to escalation, she may end up becoming the victim (Straus et al, 1980). Another reason is that viewing the woman only as “victim” will not help the women who have been the aggressors, and who may have done so as a result of fear or provocation. The victim oriented framework views women as passively receiving the aggression being meted out to them, and by doing so defines them as helpless beings incapable of acting on their own behalf to put a stop or lessen the abuse (Roiphe, 1993). Currently, women are mandated to attend services which aren’t designed for them, and which may not be appropriate in helping them lessen the violence they commit within the relationship (Dowd et al., 2005). Therapy programs for aggressive women can be seen as another opportunity to intervene in the cycle of violence that occurs between the couple (Dowd, 2001). However, more needs to be understood about female aggression in situationally violent relationship, and the impact that aggression has on the couple relationship.

### CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to explore and understand the impact female aggression has on the couple relationship utilizing a secondary analysis of a larger study conducted by Rosen et al. (2004). The original study was an exploration of the different categories of IPV that Johnson developed. This chapter describes the research methods used to gather the data for the first study, as well as explaining the procedures such as the design and method of analysis for this study.

#### Participants and Selection Process

The original study recruited potential participants via advertising and networking through churches and treatment professionals. In order to be eligible for this study, participants had to be over 18 years old, in a committed relationship with a partner, and there had to be concern about conflict by either one or both partners. For the data collection process, 18 couples read and signed a consent form before being administered a revised Conflict Tactics Scale questionnaire (Appendix A). Afterwards, fifteen couples who indicated emotional and physical abuse through their responses to the questionnaire were asked to participate in one hour semi structured interviews (Appendix B) conducted primarily by faculty and masters' level students of an accredited marriage and family therapy program. Of the fifteen couples interviewed, ten were classified as examples of situational violence, or SCV, one as a mutual violent control, three as violent resistant, and one as pseudo intimate terrorism, a category similar to IT, except that the woman was the primary aggressor, and her male partner didn't indicate feeling terror towards her. The original sample was 40% African American, 33% White, 13% Latino, and 10% Asian American participants (Rosen et. al., 2005).

For the present study, four couples were chosen out of the ten who were categorized as being in a situationally violent relationship. The four couples that were chosen for this multiple case study indicated that the woman either committed the same amount or the majority of the physical aggression in the relationship. For this study, I focused on the interviews of these four couples in order to fully understand the impact female aggression has on the couple relationship. To fully explore female aggression, it seemed appropriate to limit the factor of male aggression as much as possible, and so used intensity sampling to choose couples that could provide rich insight and an in-depth understanding on the topic of female aggression (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All four of the chosen couples identified themselves as African-American. There were other couples which indicated primarily female aggression, however, they were not found within the SCV category.

### Procedures

Each partner in the larger study was interviewed separately in roughly one hour interviews which asked questions revolving around main themes such as the resolution of the conflict, how each partner attempted to influence the other, what occurred when violence broke out, and trying to make sense of the violence. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then analyzed by three of the authors; a consensus was reached on what category each couple fit into. Each couple was assigned a code in order to conceal their identity; in order to protect their confidentiality names and identifying information was changed.

From the interviews of the four chosen couples, information about female aggression was gathered from the responses made by both men and women to the open-ended

questions asked. Also, their answers to portions of the quantitative surveys they had filled originally were accessed. The quantitative surveys participants had filled included the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS 2), and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). For the purposes of this study, their answers were accessed so as to provide specific information about the relationship violence that occurred, as well as to assess the couples' level of relationship satisfaction.

Since the interviews have already been transcribed, this researcher kept a journal of emerging themes while keeping in mind the research questions. Keeping these themes in mind, this researcher then went back to the transcripts and open-coded them. My advisor assisted me in coding one of the interviews. Related themes that emerged from the data were grouped together. The research questions were:

- 1) How does female aggression affect the couple relationship?
- 2) What contextual factors have an impact on the aggression?
- 3) What are the perceptions of each partner in the SCV relationship about the motivations behind the female partner aggression toward her male partner?

### Instruments

The quantitative surveys the four couples had filled out in the original study was accessed in order to learn more about the intensity and frequency of aggression within the couple relationship, as well as to find out what level of relationship satisfaction each participant indicated. The two instruments used for the purposes of this study were the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.

*Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2*

The original CTS was a self-report scale used in national surveys to assess the prevalence of aggression in the couple relationship (Straus & Gelles, 1986). The CTS was revised in 1996 to the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2) that also assessed the prevalence of physical, emotional, and verbal aggression each partner perpetrated against the other (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996). Participants were asked a variety of questions about the frequency they had committed each type of aggression within the last year with responses from “1” (no, this never happened) to “7” (more than 20 times in the past year). If they committed or experienced one of the actions in the question, but not within the past year, the participant could choose “8”, which meant “yes, but not within the past year.” The revised version was used in this study to learn more about the frequency and intensity that participants reported for themselves and their partner. (See Appendix A).

#### *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS)*

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens, & Bugaighis, 1986) is typically used to measure an individual’s satisfaction within their relationship and with their partner. It is composed of a likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). While it consists of three questions, this study focused on how partners’ answered one of the questions: “How satisfied are you with your current marriage or relationship?”

#### Design and Analysis

This mixed-methods study was designed to understand female aggression and the impact it has on the couple relationship from the perspective of both partners. Johnson (2006) has expressed the need for research which differentiates the type of category the

IPV falls into; the research conducted by Rosen et al. (2005) differentiated between different categories of IPV. In order to learn more about female aggression and the impact it has on a relationship, the stories both partners had about their relationship was explored. A qualitative design seemed more appropriate to delving into the themes present in their stories. Rosen et al. (2005) had already conducted a research study which fit the criteria needed for this study: they differentiated between different categories of IPV, and they gathered information from both partners in the relationship. The data has already been transcribed, but hasn't previously been analyzed with an eye to exploring the topic of female aggression.

The data was examined by keeping a journal of emerging themes while focusing on how female aggression affects the couple relationship, as well as exploring the contextual factors that impact aggression and the motivation for female aggression against her partner. The initial analysis occurred when the transcripts were read over with the research questions in mind. A journal assisted in keeping notes about possible themes that emerged about the impact of female aggression on the relationship, on contextual factors that were present, and on possible motivations for female aggression. Each couple was focused on as a unit so as to gain a deeper understanding of the couple relationship. Furthermore, their answers to the quantitative survey they had completed at the beginning of the previous study was accessed so as to provide specific information about the relationship violence that occurred, as well as to assess the couples' level of relationship satisfaction.

Using the constant comparative method of data analysis, sentences and phrases were broken down so as to give names to the concepts and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once themes had emerged from each couple, they were grouped together, and

through open coding, categories for the data were organized. Additionally, my advisor assisted in coding one of the interviews with me and discussed how these emerging themes can be grouped into the categories. Once this was done, the transcripts were read through with these categories in mind, and the information recoded under these categories. The named categories were continually defined, as this researcher organized the themes following continuing reading of the transcripts as well as discussions with her advisor. Having another person code part of the data so as to make sure that the data is arranged appropriately into categories that fit both the study and the data collected was a necessary part of the analysis (Patton, 2002).

In summary, the perceptions of four heterosexual couples about female aggression within their relationship were studied in a multiple case study. Information from the eight participants were analyzed and coded with the assistance of a journal utilizing the open-coding method that Straus and Corbin (1990) described.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Demographics

This chapter includes detailed information about each couple in the multiple case study as well as the themes that were identified in response to each of the questions in this study. The themes include the impact female aggression had on the couple relationship, the contextual factors that were present, and the perceived motivations of female aggression.

The four chosen couples in this multiple case study are African-American and range in age from 20 to 32 years old. Two of them are married, while one couple is engaged, and the other in a serious relationship. Two of the couples have children together, while within another couple, the woman has a child from a previous relationship. All four couples were categorized as being in the situational couples violence category, and female aggression is present within all of them. The following section will introduce the four couples and their stories, as well as provide more detailed information on the aggression in their relationship and relationship satisfaction (Table 1).

**Table 1: CTS2 and KMSS findings**

Name	CTS2 Self to partner (amount of times in past year)	CTS2 Partner against self (amount of times in past year)	KMSS Scale of: 1 “Very Satisfied” to 7 “Very Dissatisfied”
Adam	Threw things at her (over year ago) Twisted hair/pulled arm (over year ago) Bruised her (over a year ago) Pushed/shoved her (over year ago) Slammed her against wall	Throws things at him (2) Left the house (+20) Slapped him (1)	“Very satisfied”

	(over a year ago) Left (6-10) Slapped her (over year ago)		
Alicia	Throws things at him (3-5) Pushed/shoved (2) Used gun/knife (over year ago) Punch/hit (1) Grabbed him (1) Left house/room (6-10) Kicked him (1)	Throws things at her (1) Twisted hair/arm (over a year ago) Punch/hit (over year ago) Choked her (over a year ago) Slammed her against wall (over a year ago) Left her (6-10) Grabbed her (over a year ago)	“Very satisfied”
Brian	Twisted hair/pulled arm (2) Bruised her (2) Pushed/shoved her (2) Grabbed her (2)	Twisted hair/pulled arm (2) Bruised him (2) Pushed shoved him (2) Choked him (1) Grabbed him (6-10) Slapped him (2) Kicked him (2)	Did not indicate
Brianna	throws things at him (3-5) Twisted hair/arm (3-5) Bruised him (6-10) Pushed/shoved him (6-10) Punched shoved him (3-5) Grabbed him (2) Slapped him (2) Kicked him (2)	Twisted hair/arm (2) Bruised her (3-5) Pushed/shoved her (1)	“Very satisfied”
Carl	Pushed/shoved her (2) Grabbed her (1) Left room/house (3-5)	Threw something at him (1) Gave him a bruise (1) Pushed/shoved him (3-5) Punched him (1) Grabbed him (2) Left room/house (3-5) Slapped him (2) Was in physical pain due to her aggression (1)	“a little dissatisfied”
Catherine	Threw something that hurt (6-10) Twisted arm/hair (1) Pushed shoved him (3-5) Pushed w/ something that	Threw something that hurt (2) Pushed/shoved her (2) Choked her (1) Slammed her against wall (1)	“a little dissatisfied”

	<p>hurt (2)  Choked him (2)  Slammed him against the wall (2)  Grabbed him (3-5)  Slapped him (2)  He had physical pain due to her aggression (1)</p>	<p>Grabbed her (2)</p>	
Eliot	<p>Threw something at her (1)  Twisted her arm/hair (2)  Pushed/shoved her (6-10)  Punched/hit her (1)  Choked her (1)  Slammed her against wall (1)  Grabbed her (6-10)  Leaves house/room: (+20 )  Slapped her (2)  Kicked her (1)</p>	<p>Threw something at him (1)  She twisted his arm/hair (1)  Pushed/shoved him (6-10)  She punched/hit him (1)  Choked him (1)  Slammed him against wall (1)  Grabbed him (6-10)  Leaves house/room (+20)  Slapped him (2)  Kicked him (1)</p>	<p>“ a little dissatisfied”</p>
Elizabeth	<p>Threw something at him (3-5)  Twisted air/hair (2)  Pushed/shoved him (3-5)  Knocked him unconscious (3-5)  Choked him (3-5)  Grabbed him (6-10)  Kicked him (1)</p>	<p>Threw something at her that hurt (6-10)  Twisted her hair/arm (6-10)  Pushed/shoved him (3-5)  He choked her (6-10)  Forced her to have sex (+20)</p>	<p>Did not indicate</p>

### *Couple 1*

Adam is a 32 year old male married the past 8 years to Alicia, a 29 year old woman. Their first child was born at the beginning of the marriage, and their second child is several months old. They both rated themselves as being “Very happy” in the relationship on the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (KMS) questionnaire. However, on other questions on the survey, Adam indicated that he regrets his marriage and considers ending the relationship “occasionally” while Alicia considers ending the relationship and

regrets their marriage “all the time”. Although the couple rate themselves as “very satisfied” on the KMS, other answers provided to questions in the survey they completed and in their interviews indicate otherwise.

Adam grew up in a 2 parent military household; he reported no abuse, although he described his father as an authoritarian man who was the disciplinarian in the family. When he was 16 years old, Adam was sent to military school due to behavioral problems, which he feels had a large impact in influencing his view of women. His marriage is the first serious relationship he has been in, and the most volatile. He dropped out of college, where he played football, and joined the Navy; at the time Alicia was pregnant. He is recently working towards getting his college degree and quit working prior to the new baby’s arrival.

Alicia grew up with her mother in a one parent household: her parents separated when she was young. Her parents had two other daughters and a son together, and after they separated, her mother had a son with another man. She grew up in a “fixed income” family. There were five of them in the family while she was growing up, and although she doesn’t consider her family of origin as abusive, there was a lot of conflict; she described her mother as a yeller. Alicia is a hair stylist who works part time, and has some college education. Her baby sister died recently; her husband, who was close to that sister, took it hard when she died. She is estranged from her other sister, and her mother also died within the past 8 years. Alicia has been in several physically violent relationships, most of which involved substance abuse; one ex drew a gun on her at one point. She used to drink, but stopped about 2 years prior to the study. She identified herself as being more physically aggressive than her husband, but blames his provocation and verbal abuse.

The couple met at a college party. Most of their arguments focus on differences in parenting and finances; he likes to spend, she likes to be thriftier. The majority of their fights involve verbal violence; the physical violence is generally directed from her to him; both partners discussed his “agitating her” to lose control. Adam pulls her hair, bends her finger, steps on her toes so she can’t leave, and has “smacked her” a few times. Alicia is usually the one who hits him, and during one incident threw a knife at him. They have been to couples counseling several times in the past, once in the late 90’s and the other several months prior to the interview. Adam stopped drinking 6 months ago, but prior to that was a heavy drinker, while she stopped drinking almost 2 years ago.

#### *Couple 2*

Brian is a 27 year old male married the past 6 months to Brianna, a 20 year woman; the couple was together for 2 years prior to their marriage, although they knew each other for most of their lives. They don’t have any children currently. During the 2 years before their marriage, Brian was in jail for 14 months. On the KMS Brian did not rate his satisfaction in the relationship, although he indicated that he considered ending the relationship “most of the time”. Brianna rated herself as “very satisfied” on the KMS.

Brian’s parents are still living together, and he is the second youngest of seven siblings. He remembers his parents physically fighting while growing up (pushing and shoving) and describes the environment as “rough”. However, his parents stayed together, and have been married about 35 years at the point of the interview. He had two serious relationships before being with Brianna, although he used to have a lot of one night stands, and still likes to go out partying.

Brianna's parents divorced when she was young, and she lived with her mother and brother. She's close to them as well as to her extended family, but was estranged from her father until recently; he cheated on her mother, and she has other siblings born from different mothers. Brianna is in college, and is finishing up with a major in Criminal Justice. She has had a couple of other serious relationships, but nothing that has lasted very long; she describes herself as "abusive" physically and verbally. Also, she usually ended up cheating on most of her previous boyfriends. Overall, Brianna describes herself as a very angry person who has a hard time controlling her temper.

Brian states that when they argue they get very verbally abusive, and that Brianna is usually the one who starts anything physical like scratching. Brianna describes their relationship as verbally abusive, a lot of yelling and screaming; she reports that most people in her family didn't have good relationships, which led to her feeling that "relationships don't work". Their fighting involves mild physical abuse directed from her towards him; Brianna hits, pushes, shoves, kicks, and slaps him while he has pushed and shoved. They both say things to hurt each other; Brian tends to be sarcastic and will directly go for the things that bother her such as her weight and comparing her to her mother. Brianna admits that she uses violence to get her way.

They fight over finances, jealousy, friends, sex, and leisure activities. They had two big fights which happened when they were drinking which resulted in more physical aggression than usual for both partners. Although Brian tries to shut down and back off at some point in an argument, Brianna's "fussing" will usually re-engage him into the argument. Other times, he seems to pick at her until she gives in, or loses her temper.

*Couple 3*

Carl is a 26 year old male who has been in a serious relationship the past 6 months to Catherine, a 23 year old woman, although they've known each other over a year through church friends. The couple doesn't have children together, and consider themselves as "unofficially engaged". Carl discussed proposing in the near future. Both have rated their relationship as "a little dissatisfied" on the KMS. They also indicated that they both "occasionally" consider ending the relationship.

Carl's dad passed away recently, and he moved to the area. His dad was a pastor, and Carl considered him a good role model, bringing up that his dad taught him to be affectionate and nurturing. His parents had a good relationship together; he's always looked to it as an example of what a relationship should be. Catherine is the first serious relationship he's been in since breaking up with an old high school sweetheart; he described that first relationship as "volatile" in a verbal sense. He complains about Catherine's physical aggression towards him, stating that "as far as my part I think hitting is wrong on both sides of the relationship. I don't think I should abuse her and likewise, me I don't think I, I definitely don't want to be abused or whatever." When things get heated up, he tends to leave the house and either drive around, or go to a friend's house to cool down.

Catherine is a single mother from a previous relationship, and has been in abusive relationships in the past; one ex boyfriend would punch her. She put herself through college while a single mother. Both partners stated that she is the one most likely to initiate physical aggression against Carl. Both bring up her reactivity and anger.

Until 6 months ago, the couple didn't see each other very much; Carl used to live in Maryland and would see her about once a month, and communicated mainly through the

telephone. His moving in with Catherine was the first time they have been together for any length of time since meeting. Catherine described how they didn't argue much before moving in since they would ignore a problem. However, they are now arguing more frequently. Catherine and Carl both feel they need to resolve their problems since they are in a committed relationship, but appear to feel that their problems will be solved once they are married. Carl plans on changing some of his behaviors that he thinks trigger her, such as going out without her.

Catherine pushes, shoves, grabs him, throws things at him, and slaps him, while Carl has pushed and grabbed her. According to Catherine, he has also choked and slammed her against the wall once in the past year. They both have left the house about 3-5 times each in the past year. Overall, Catherine's violence towards Carl is rated as occurring more frequently than his violence towards her. Some of the things the couple fights over include demonstrations of affection, friends, the amount of time they spend together, and differences in their goals in life. They both tend to be jealous if their partner spends time with opposite sex friends.

#### *Couple 4*

Eliot is a 21 year old male in a relationship with Elizabeth, a 20 year old female. The couple has known each other since they were around 12 years old, and have been in a relationship for the past 3 years. They have a son together. They're not engaged, and have lived together, although it is unclear if they are still living together currently. On the KMS Eliot rates himself as "a little dissatisfied" in their relationship; on the questions about regretting the relationship, and ending it, he rated himself as "most of the time". Elizabeth

did not rate herself for marital satisfaction; however she indicated she thought about ending the relationship “all the time”.

Eliot has a tight knit family, and the deaths of his grandmother, mother, and closest sister over the past year had a big impact on him. He’s become closer to other members of his family as a result, as well as pulling away from Elizabeth. He’s been in one other serious relationship prior to the one with Elizabeth, although he’s “fooled around” with other people before. Eliot believes that he is Elizabeth’s “rebound guy” and that she wasn’t really committed to the relationship in the beginning. She was interested in someone else, although it doesn’t seem that they ever had a relationship. By the time she had fully committed to him he wasn’t as interested in her, and had “numbed” himself to her. So it seems he pulled back from her, and she became more reactive as a result, more criticizing, acting more jealous, and physically aggressive which made him disengage more. He says he will fight back if she picks a fight, although she will usually initiate the physical and he reacts.

Elizabeth describes her family of origin as “not good”; she was raised by her grandmother, along with 4 sisters and 3 brothers. The one sister she was close to got “into drugs” and they no longer communicate. She witnessed domestic violence by her dad towards her mother for around 6 years, until her mother started hitting back. Her parents are still together. She tried to overdose while in high school and was hospitalized and diagnosed as “manic depressive”; she ended up dropping out of school. She thinks things changed in their relationship when his sister died a year ago and that prior to that they had had a good relationship. Currently, both identify the only good thing in the relationship being their son.

Elliot and Elizabeth state that things changed for the worse in the past year, and blame the other for changing; this includes the start of the physical aggression. Elliot reports he pushes her, chokes her, and forces her to have sex, while she grabs him, chokes him, pushes and shoves, and has made him pass out after being hit on the head. Elizabeth also reports that he forces her to have sex. They both blame the other for initiating the violence, but each admit that they will retaliate if they are hit; Elizabeth feels she has a right to fight back, especially when he's deliberately making her angry and being disrespectful.

Their relationship involves physical and verbal aggression from both of them; neither of them seems afraid of the other and neither of them wants to back down, and will either match or outdo each other when fighting. An argument could escalate from arguing to pinching to punching. They both accuse the other of cheating and trying to control them. They argue over friends, sexual relationship, their different philosophy of life, in-laws, time spent together, leisure time, jealousy and infidelity.

#### COMMON THEMES ACROSS COUPLES

The following section explores the themes that arose in response to the three research questions. The three questions seek to understand more fully the impact female aggression has on the relationship, to learn what situational stressors may impact female aggression, and to discover what motivates these women to be physically aggressive. However, one of the revealed themes didn't necessarily answer any of the questions asked, but did reveal important information about the couple relationship. Female aggression was often minimized in the couple relationship. The fact that female aggression was minimized

was interesting considering the ways couples discussed female aggression as impacting the relationship.

### *Minimization*

All eight of the participants minimized the level and intensity of physical violence exhibited by the female partner at some point during the interview. This minimization occurred in a variety of ways. One way was through the interview, all the men and most of the women laughed at least once when discussing female violence, and most downplayed possible physical harm that was committed as a result of the woman's aggression. For example, when Carl was asked where and how often his partner hits him he replied, "(laughingly) I guess wherever her hand can reach (laughing)" and "I'd have to say she starts it..." (laughing). No participant reported that the male partner was afraid or frightened by the female aggression.

Another way female aggression was minimized was on the CTS; three out of the four couples exhibited a pattern where the men reported less violence directed towards themselves from their partner than the female reported having committed. Also, participants minimized the violence when they attempted to justify female aggression by bringing up size difference. When describing the female aggression, both men and women referred to their physical differences, appearing to excuse hitting by bringing up how small women were in comparison to men.

*Alicia: "he won't hit me, he will just start to, not now, he is not touching me or anything like that, he will just like say hurtful things. Um, but before, he would be like just get in my face and be like... step on my toe while he talking, you know,*

*stuff like, just to provoke me... And then, I admit, I hit him several times, I mean, he is a big man and I am not”*

Overall the physical aggression by the woman didn't appear to be a focus for most of the couples, and even when they brought up the woman's aggression as a problem, they focused more on other aspects of the relationship, such as the verbal abuse. When Alicia and Adam argue, she feels that he picks at her until she loses her temper and reacts physically. She is more upset over remarks he makes and ways he gets her to lose control than the violence. She describes how it: “makes me want to fight. When, what hurts me more, cause he is not hurting me, he is degrading me, so in a sense that is hurting me, but it is more.”

How does female aggression impact the couple relationship?

During the process of understanding the couples' relationships and how both partners may have perceived the impact of female aggression on their relationships, several themes arose. They include themes of female aggression influencing a woman's power in the relationship; a pattern of female aggression leading to escalation of violence, and of female aggression leading to feelings of abandonment.

*Female aggression becomes a factor in the struggle for power in the relationship*

Sometimes female physical aggression causes a woman to lose power in the relationship and sometimes it increases her power. The majority of the men in the relationships deny at least once during their interview that the woman's aggression has impacted the way they behave. A few of the men mentioned viewing their partners' aggression towards them as the female partner losing control, and would admit to intentionally provoking their partner to lose control. Some of them, such as Adam,

purposely push their partners' buttons to the point where they become physically aggressive, and then hold it against her in a "see what you did" way.

*Adam: "I kinda like when she tries to get physical I kinda like I don't know laugh it off. I just see there's really no point in trying you know. The physical stuff for me is not part of my personality you know. We got into it and I don't know where it came from ... but um more, so I'm more verbal to be honest, how it really plays out .....(laugh)"*

All the men bring up the power they have in the relationship. However, they later describe changing behaviors and routine in an effort to not trigger their partner. Elliot changed his behavior not because he's afraid of his partner's physical violence, but because sometimes he doesn't want to trigger her. He describes how his partner uses verbal abuse to get her way.

*Elliot: "if she wants to do somethin' and she wants, you know, if she wants to go somewhere to do something, if I don't do it, then I'm no good and I don't love her, and all this other stuff".*

Catherine, one of the two female participants who reported using anger to gain control of the situation and get their way describes the process.

*Catherine : "I become physical to get the response out of him, that I, you know that I want, the response that I wanted, so it will end once he says what I want to hear, or, once he is doing what I want him to do."*

Therefore it appears that with several of the couples, even though the woman loses power when she ultimately resorts to physical aggression, she may also end up gaining it in

other ways in the relationship. Since her partner may change habits and patterns to avoid setting her off, she gains some power and influence.

*Female aggression becomes part of a cyclical relationship which can lead to escalation of violence in the couple*

All the participants discussed times when arguments would escalate as they continued to react to each other, a type of “cyclical” pattern. As a result, things had the potential to spiral out of control, leading to further physical aggression. Things also had the potential to remain at a lower level of tension, with one or both partners stopping the escalation process.

Adam describes how his partner’s physical aggression makes him want to step it up so she doesn’t think she’s running the relationship. Their argument then escalates until he leaves, or it reaches a level where one of them will stop. So even though it appears that her physical violence is often minimized and perhaps not taken seriously, Adam describes a potentially dangerous pattern which includes her aggression. This pattern can be potentially dangerous in several ways to the couple and their relationship; one way is the physical danger a woman faces if an argument escalates to a point where her partner retaliates against her.

*Adam: “I’m the man. Is she trying to pump me or something?...She can be aggressive. I’ve had to step up. I’m not going to let her, she’s not running the relationship you know what I mean ” and “it [the argument]bounces back and forth ...actually it’s kinda cyclical the pattern, but it’s also at the same time it depends on the season what’s going on stress levels; it can be stressful at times because... when it’s pleasant it’s um pleasant basically, basically it revolves*

*around me, so what's going on in my life um and even though it's pleasant it still is up to me to set the tone”.*

While both the women and men in this study retaliated physically against their partners, three of the four men did so rarely. These three men brought up one to two incidents over the past year where they ended up physically aggressing against their partners; it appeared that the majority of these incidents were the result of an escalation process which included female aggression against them.

Another way this pattern of escalation is dangerous is that male partners also risks serious injury by the women. Several of the participants brought up times when their male partner was seriously injured as a result of female aggression. Alicia describes an argument which led to her throwing a knife at Adam; it appears that he may have pushed her, which is what then led to her response. (Angela said context?)

*Alicia: “I will let you know everything I am feeling and how I feel and how much I hate you, damn you, down to my toes. I can do that. And then, he only, I mean one time he did that to me and I had been cooking in the kitchen and he did that and I fell and then I could not even see anything, I just grabbed the knife and threw it. Which is bad and it got him in the back of his leg. But, he then just left me, went outside and came back. So he, I guess I don't handle things cause I will blow up fast also.”*

Brianna describes an incident where as a result of her aggression, her partner was rendered unconscious. Interestingly, her partner, Brian did not describe this incident during his interview, although it was indicated on his CTS questionnaire.

*Brianna: "it's a lot of anger when I'm fightin'. But like if I hurt him, it's like, "Oh, my G-d, I hurt him," or something like that, but I'm still too hateful to be like, "Are you okay?" I might be like, um, like he knows my way of askin' if he's okay, if we're angry, like, "Get up," or somethin' like that. And um, that's probably what snaps me out of it, either somebody being there and or seeing it, me acting like that, or either me hurting him"*

A theme that emerged as part of the escalation process was the wish to not appear “weak”, which led to partners matching each others’ level of aggression or even escalating beyond it. This appeared to be connected with gender expectations. For many women, looking strong was important; it led to their responding to both physical and verbal abuse coming at them from their partner. Several of the women remarked that the verbal abuse was what hurt them the most, and that they were more likely to react to it physically. Alicia describes how she is willing to hold her ground, and keep fighting rather than give in to him, which eventually leads to her physical aggression.

*Alicia: "...I don't want kids on the street or nothing like that. But, I would risk that now rather than keep putting up with verbal abuse...I can't really say it is just him, because I am just as much, you know, if he says something to hurt me, I will say something that I know is going to hurt him even more. So, back and back and back and back. Which is sick."*

Interestingly, many of the men bring up how they appreciate their partners’ strength, and at times don’t appear to find it a negative trait. All four of the men acknowledged their partners’ strength, and stated that it was a trait that they valued their partner having.

*Carl: “about the only real concerns that I have, only she's very independent you know, she is very intelligent, and that's cool. It's not that I want a weak woman at all because that would make me, umh that's not, I don't think that's the best thing for me. Sometimes though I think she is being a little bit too strong, a little bit too independent and it minimizes my impact on the relationship I feel sometimes.”*

*Female aggression leads both partners to question their commitment to each other*

Female aggression didn't always lead to a process where an argument escalates and spirals out of control. All the participants reported a form of abandonment as a result of female aggression. This abandonment included physically leaving after a fight, as well as emotionally disengaging from the relationship. The impact of this abandonment was that it led participants to question their own or their partners' commitment towards the relationship. At times, the abandonment also engendered feelings of insecurity about a partners' ability to be faithful, which then led to increased questioning of partners' commitment. For many of the couples, it appeared that when a woman was physically aggressive, her partner was more likely to leave the house, anywhere from hours to days on end. Brianna's describes how her partner threatens to leave her when their arguments escalate and she is physically violent against him “If we're arguing, he'll tell me we'll get a divorce then...you know, that kind of stuff.” Catherine states that she thinks her partner may question his commitment towards her due to her aggression towards him.

*Catherine: “it affects our relationship because, that that's not the way that we should behave, I mean, I should not hit him, and I definitely don't want him hitting on me so I mean that's something that I am gonna have to work on because that's not the way I want it to be and I am sure he is not happy with it either. But I mean*

*we still... we don't break up with each other so we're still committed in a relationship but then, that makes me think about things... he may think I don't care about him because I hit do hit on him.”*

Although not every couple brought up leaving the relationship as a result of female physical aggression, most described an escalation that included female aggression, which often times led to a pattern where a partner would leave. The leaving was then seen as the primary issue. When there was an issue of an actual or perceived threat of abandonment, many of the women became more reactive, and appeared to be more aggressive. The leaving would become another issue over which to argue about, and in some cases, would trigger the woman to be even more aggressive later on. This abandonment often times led to partners questioning their commitment to the relationship. Brianna goes on to say how even though she knows he's not serious, it still affects their relationship; the immediate repercussions are that she's more likely to be physically aggressive towards him.

*Adam: “here I am in life questioning whether I want to be married and stuff and she's real pushy I mean, just shut up sometimes. She will not...mainly it's like .... stop pushing my buttons, stop pushing my buttons, stop pushing my buttons, and uh what was really going on in my head is disappointment in myself and like she just she was just she would just.... disappointment and stuff and it was like the heck with that man. This is this is just aggravating”.*

Even when a couple didn't mention questioning their relationship as a result of the female aggression, some of them changed the way they interacted with each other, which may have led to a partner thinking that their level of commitment has changed.

*Carl: “ it's almost like a catch 22 because I don't try really to be affectionate anymore, regardless of how I feel, cause I'm crazy about her, you know, but I really don't.. made me curb a lot of my mannerisms, like I was saying and then it makes it seem to her that I don't care”.*

What contextual factors have an impact on the relationship?

There were several contextual factors that were shared by more than one of the couples' that appeared to influence female physical aggression toward her partner. The themes include: substance abuse, family history of loss and abuse, and situational stressors that were identified as having an impact on aggression.

#### *Substance Abuse*

Two of the couples specifically identified substance abuse having an impact on their relationship. Adam and Alicia were both heavy drinkers at one point; Alicia stopped drinking around two years prior to the interview, and Adam around six months. Both stated that the violence in their relationship has decreased significantly over the past year.

*Alicia: “Drinking, when there was a problem in our relationship he would just drink a beer and when he drinks, he does not come back... But I think he gets involved with other people, other things when he is drinking.”*

As mentioned previously, his leaving her would trigger her, making her angrier and more likely to be physically aggressive towards him. Since he stopped drinking around six months ago, Adam admits that “first of all if I'm not drinking I'm not doing anything that you know uh I'm not doing anything to make the relationship unpleasant.”

Both Brianna and Brian also identified drinking as impacting the violence in the relationship. Brianna mentioned that there was a decrease in her drinking from the

beginning of the relationship to now; she used to drink a drink almost everyday, and now drinks about once a week. Both of them identified two major fights during the interview where she was drinking heavily and where the violence between them was the heaviest it had been.

*Brianna: "but like most of the time, like the only two times that I can say we ever really got to the point that I was hitting him, we were to the point where the next day we didn't know why we were arguing. We had that much to drink."... "if I'm already mad, like we already been arguing, I might push him or something. Or if there is alcohol involved, I might hit him in the arm or something like"*

Brian admitted that without alcohol, their fighting wouldn't be as bad; however he doesn't want to cut off the drinking because "I have nothin' else to do now...I can't go nowhere...Well, I mean it all depends on how much you drink...cut back a whole lot...keep it to a minimum..."

### *Family History*

All the couples indicated incidents of abuse or loss in their past which they indicated had an impact on the aggression within the relationship. Even when the male partner experienced the loss, the impact seems to have impacted both of them. Although none of the participants indicated that family loss led to an increase in female aggression, the loss did appear to be a factor in increased tensions and arguments. As a result, the increased arguments may have led to an increase in female aggression. Elliot lost his grandmother, sister, and mother within the last several years; both he and his partner stated that that was when things started changing between them.

*Elliot: "its losing so many people and having to deal with, you know, what I'm, you know, my problem, and you know, you lose so many people, you know, everybody that's close, I mean not just family. But close, the people that you're close to, everybody that you're really close to, everybody that you actually love, love in your family, not just love 'cause they're family, dies."*

Carl's father, with whom he was very close, died recently, and Alicia lost both her mother and sister; she stated that her husband, Adam, took her sister's death hard.

*Alicia: "I don't think he deals with stress good. To me, I think maybe it depends on, when my sister died, he went off. He left, didn't come to the funeral..."*

At least one partner in each relationship identified some sort of abuse in their background. Both Brian and Brianna grew up with parents who were physically abusive towards each other. Elizabeth also grew up in a home where there was domestic violence; her father was abusive towards her mother for about 6 years until her mother learned to hit back. In the other two couples, both Catherine and Alicia were in physically abusive relationships in the past. Although not every participant with an abusive past described the impact the abuse had on their anger or relationship; several of them did. Brianna felt it influenced the way she dealt with problems; when asked about the impact of growing with all that tension, she described feeling "Frustrated. I was a very aggressive and angry person... [would deal with things by]... yellin', screamin', hittin' things".

*Brianna: "it made me feel like males were just...not evil, but you know, just...not good people, that relationships don't work. Cause, like my mom is anti-marriage. So, I guess that affected me that way. Like, I didn't think that men actually stayed with families."*

### *Situational Stressors*

All the couples had stressors that fell into categories of finance, work/school, and parenting issues. At least two couples out of the four indicated that the stressor was a source of tension between them. The stress caused by that particular stressor may have led to a pattern where female aggression against her partner occurred.

*Adam: “our big problem, I spend money and she doesn’t.... even with the kids or whatever I’m like there are certain things I am gonna have. There are certain things the kids are going to have. You know what I’m saying? It’s going to be that way and she fights it she don’t like it at all.”*

### *Mental Illness*

One couple specifically indicated that mental illness has had an impact on their relationship; this impact includes aggression from the woman towards her partner. Elizabeth mentioned in her interview that she had been diagnosed as “manic-depressive” and had overdosed while in high school.

*Elizabeth: “you’re in that state of mind, and you’re in depression, you don’t care about nobody else. You’re not thinking about nobody else. Nobody else could understand me. I don’t think most people understand...like you don’t understand, if you’ve never been there.”*

Eliot also brings up his depression as impacting the relationship.

*Elliot: “I’m just not a happy person, so I don’t think I’m gonna make her happy, if I’m not. If I’m not a happy person, we’re not, me and her are not gonna be where we could be, or where we should be. So, it’s just not a real happy. So, two depressed people together is not gonna work that well.”*

What are the perceptions of each partner in the SCV relationship about the motivations behind the female partner aggression towards male partner?

Several themes were identified during the exploration of what motivates a woman to be physically aggressive towards her partner. Some of the themes were applicable to the majority of the couples, although one was unique to only one couple. The more common themes were: Efforts to equalize power; release built up tension; abandonment; control; and retribution. One couple brought up a theme of self-defense, where it appeared the woman was physically aggressive in an effort to protect herself from her partners' aggression.

*Efforts to equalize power*

One of the motivations reported often by both partners' was a woman's effort to equalize the power dynamics in the relationship through resorting to physical aggression. According to both partners, women may have felt the power loss when they were unable to right a wrong in the relationship, when they felt unheard, or when they felt there was injustice. Two of the couples' brought up female aggression occurring due to feeling unheard, as if they didn't have a voice in the relationship. The women in these two couples mentioned an element of feeling misunderstood, that their partners' "just didn't understand."

*Catherine: "once we're together after the arguing over the phone, and then it's just a lot of yelling. Then I am the one that always either picks up something and throws it , or I'd just try to hit him or something like that. I would prefer that it not end up like that. I mean, as far as me throwing things and trying to push him and hit him. And if he could just understand where I am coming from that I just don't like it...I*

*have no clue why I blow up the way I do....I don't know why I decide to become physical. I mean, it's just that I get so angry, and I feel like he doesn't, he doesn't you know understand how upset I am, and it just feels like if I reach out and hit him or throw something then, he becomes more aware of exactly how upset I am.”*

It was interesting to find that her partner, Carl, also indicated in his interview that he knew Catherine felt this way.

*Carl: “I guess she has said I get my way all the time, you know, maybe I do, I guess she probably called, maybe I might put pressure on her into doing some thing I guess...I mean just by everything that we do is based around my schedule...I'll say certain things, it's not like I'm pulling hair or twisting arms or anything, I don't know maybe I just badger you know till I get...”*

All the couples indicated that the women were frustrated over feeling that their partner has more control in the relationship, and therefore more power. Alicia describes how she feels she doesn't have a voice in the relationship; she later reported that this leads to her violence against Adam.

*Alicia: “I feel like now what I say doesn't matter. I mean, doesn't, we are not equal because whatever you want is what we are going to do. So, I mean I feel like it doesn't really matter how I feel about certain things because we are going to do what he wants to do...I have an opinion about something, and basically it is going to be his way.”*

Adam also indicated in his interview that believed his wife was often times physically aggressive because of feeling frustrated over how he continually gets his way. He admits to controlling her for her own good.

*Adam: “ I want her to do things like she doesn’t want to use the computer and I feel like you gotta learn to use a computer I mean so we have hard time in things I think she should be like me .....not that I make million she should be where I’m at my education and what I’m doing and be ready to be on board.”*

Not every couple agreed that the female partners’ perception of a power imbalance was justified. Elizabeth and Eliot both agree that female aggression occurs due to her feeling controlled and in Eliot’s power; however they disagree on if that is the reality. Elizabeth reports how her partner controls her ability to go places, and interact with friends.

*Elizabeth: “then like he leaves with his friends, and I can’t go nowhere. My life stopped since I had a baby. I don’t have a life, I don’t go nowhere, I don’t do nothin’ but when he goes out with his friends, I’m supposed to sit in my house and wait around for him, and I’m not gonna do it.”*

On the other hand, her partner Elliot reports that Elizabeth may think she is being controlled, which is leading to her physical aggression against him, but that isn’t truly the case, and Elizabeth is the one really controlling things.

*Elliot: “if she wants to do somethin’ and she wants, you know, uh, if she wants to go somewhere to do something, if I don’t do it then, I’m no good and I don’t love her, and all this other stuff.”*

#### *Releasing built up of tension*

One of the couples brought up that female aggression often occurred in their relationship as a reaction to outside events rather than in an effort to equalize things between partners. Brianna and Brian both attributed the majority of her aggression

towards him as due to frustration over other things in life; they described a pattern where she would become frustrated with events occurring in her family of origin which led to a build up of tension. She often times discharged tension in the form of physical aggression against her partner, taking it all out on him.

*Brianna: "I don't know how to discuss things. That's probably the worst thing. My temper is still bad and I take things out on him. That's probably the worst thing. I take things out on him when...he's not guilty."*

Brian agrees that his partners' aggression is a result of releasing tension caused by other family members.

*Brian: "I think it does come from her mom. 'Cause she's seen a lot, and you know I'm sayin' and a lot of pressure, that happens when her mother and father got separated, and her brother was like out of control. He just ran around naked and everything falls down on her, and all the problems come around, and they call her. So, I think that has a lot to do with it."*

### *Control*

Another theme revealed was that all the female participants indicated that they deliberately used aggression to get their way. Some admitted to it as a form of control over their partners and in the relationship. Brianna reports on how eventually her partner gives into her wishes.

*Brianna: "Well, (soft laugh) if I get mad at him, then he'll get frustrated and like "G-d, how do or whatever..." you know. Even if I don't say anything, it's just like if I hold my ground, he'll always give in and I know that. So if I really want to do something and I know he doesn't, I just hold my ground and he'll cave in...It's bad,*

*but I just know that I can get what I want. And he'll tell you... "she gets everything she wants." I know that if I wanted, I could get whatever I want now."*

Catherine also describes how she uses her aggression to manipulate the response she wants from him.

*Catherine: "I become physical to get the response out of him, that I, you know that I want, the response that I wanted, so it will end once he says what I want to hear, or, once he is doing what I want him to do."*

On the other hand, some used physical aggression so that their partner wouldn't know how vulnerable they were. Elizabeth mentions how she'd rather show anger rather than sadness when her partner leaves; she would cry when he leaves, but doesn't want him to see her crying because he would know how much he had hurt her. His witnessing of her injury would cause

*Elizabeth: "He's the type of guy who likes to see someone cry. I mean I try not to cry in front of him..."*

#### *Abandonment*

Many of the women were physically aggressive due to feeling abandoned in some form by their partners; either their partner cheated or threatened to be unfaithful, or their partner had a habit of leaving, which led to the woman feeling insecure in the stability of their relationship. Another identified reason for feeling abandoned was the fear that the male partner is pulling away from them in the relationship.

Infidelity was one of the categories which led to a women being physically aggressive towards her partners. Three of the couples had at least one partner who discussed known infidelity; the fourth one brought up arguments over jealousy, but no

known infidelity. Carl cheated on his partner several months prior to the interview, which led to Catherine feeling that he “destroyed a lot of trust”. None of the men indicated in their interview actual infidelity, however, all talked about their partners’ jealousy, and a few hinted that there was actual infidelity, such as when Adam discusses the messages he learned in military school about being a man.

*Adam: “I was impressionable, I guess like to not be faithful.”*

Although Brian and Brianna didn’t specifically mention infidelity, they did discuss issues of jealousy; Brian makes her jealousy seem unreasonable, stating that she will get angry if he looks too long at a woman while watching TV. However, when he wants to rile her up, he tells her “I could go out there, and get it from somewhere else... and I tell her that.” Catherine discusses her reaction when she found out about Carl’s infidelity.

*Catherine: “we were talking, I asked him did he cheat on me, he said yes, there was some...you know. I just lost control, there was crying.. and then I just punched him. I mean I can't really recall it very well because it was a big thing for me.”*

Even when the infidelity wasn’t confirmed, the threat of it appeared to trigger female aggression.

*Alicia: “When I thought he was cheating on me I found myself wanting to, he was a sleep, I knew something was going on, I know he talked to her on the phone, he was on the phone and I knew something was going on. I was still pregnant and we weren’t sleeping and I went there and threw the phone at him and pulled his hair and I was like, get out and I threw all his clothes outside. So, I did start that actually.”*

Although all the couples had patterns of leaving when there was fighting, only two specifically mentioned it as a reason the female partner became physically aggressive.

Adam discusses how his leaving triggers her, but that he needs to leave at the time so he wouldn't escalate the argument to a point where he is physically aggressive towards her.

### *Retribution*

Three of the couples indicated that female aggression was motivated by a desire for retribution against the male partner. None of these three couples indicated that the female partner was intimidated or scared in their relationship. The women punished their partners for various reasons such as leaving, or verbal abuse. Catherine becomes angry when her partner goes out partying due to fears over his being unfaithful.

*Catherine: "...I don't go out and party like he does...So he has, you know more friends and he takes advantage of the fact that I am just more of a homebody. And it just makes me mad, because I feel...I guess I feel I'm being taken advantage of and so that just drives me out of control."*

Adam describes how his partner gets really angry that he is not being "punished" for leaving; she had attempted to call the police previous times, and had been told by them that they couldn't do anything. Adam then believes his partner becomes physically reactive in order to punish him for leaving

*Adam: "cuz she doesn't think a man should leave his family. Somebody should make me pay. Some how she couldn't beat me physically; she would try and um she would try. If she couldn't do that, it'd be something until she got over it....she wish she could punish me, and that somebody needed to show me...(laugh)."*

All the couples indicated that the women were sometimes motivated by frustration over their partner “picking” or “nagging” at them; their frustration was over the injustice their partner committed against them, which sometimes included verbal insults and provocations. As a result of this “picking”, the woman often reacted physically.

Elizabeth describes how Elliot puts her down, tells her she needs to lose weight and that no one else would want to be with her “ain’t nobody else gonna want you ‘cause you got a baby...”. Brian also reports what occurs prior to her aggression.

*Brian: “I might call her Ugly... Usually we be drinking; sometimes she be mad at me. Usually I just be laughin’. That’ll make her more unhappy, cause I laugh.”*

#### *Self-Defense*

Based on the interviews, it appeared there was one couple where the woman may have been motivated by self-defense to be physically aggressive. The violence directed towards Elizabeth appears to be considerably stronger than the violence the other female participants experienced in their current relationships. Elizabeth consistently brings up her aggression as occurring in a context of retribution. The violence appears to be severe at times, and although she didn’t indicate being fearful of her partner, her aggression may have been due to self-defense. The times that she described her “retaliating” appeared to be times when she was defending herself against his aggression towards her. She also indicated on the CTS that her partner has forced her to have sex with him over twenty times over the past year. She reported an incident that occurred while pregnant.

*Elizabeth: “He struck me when I was pregnant, I did go out to party, but I didn’t drink. I needed to get out of the house, so I went to a party... When I was pregnant. With our party, he’s like, “don’t you go to that party.” ‘Cause he was gonna be*

*there. And he pushed me down the steps...He's kicked me in the face. But I mean, I fight him back."*

## Conclusion

The goal of this study was to understand how female aggression affects the couple in situationally violent relationships and to understand the motivations the women use for aggressing against their male partner. The four couples that were chosen were categorized as being in situationally violent relationships, and their answers on the CTS indicated that each female participants was as physically aggressive, if not more, than her male partner. A theme that emerged from the data was that all the participants often minimized female aggression in a variety of ways. This was interesting considering that they all go on to describe the ways in which their relationship is impacted by her aggression. Often times, female aggression did appear to have an impact on the relationship since it sometimes led to a process where the couple would escalate and things were said and done that both partners often said were damaging to the relationship. Her aggression often times had an impact on his physical aggression towards her, which many of the couples were more concerned about. In addition, female aggression often led to the male threatening to leave.

The second research question focused on learning what contextual issues impacted the women's aggression. Two of the four couples indicated that alcohol abuse had a large impact on female aggression and again described a process where her aggression appeared to often times trigger his. Family loss and abuse also appeared to impact female aggression, even when the loss was that of the male partner. Finally, situational stressors and mental illnesses were found to be a part of the conflict in which the abuse occurred.

The final research question aimed at learning reasons female aggression occurred. Three of the four couples indicated that female aggression was often times motivated by wanting retribution against their partner. These three couples were more likely to describe the female aggression as being motivated by a desire to right a wrong, to control their male partner, or to express frustration against their partner. The fourth couple appeared to have a pattern where the woman often times was aggressive in order to defend herself from the abuse of her partner.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to gather information leading to a greater understanding of female aggression and its impact on the relationship. This study also gathered information on what situationally aggressive couples identified as motivators for female aggression, as well as information on contextual issues that may have an impact on female aggression. The four couples in this study were chosen based on criteria of being in a SCV relationship where female aggression was indicated to be equal or greater to male aggression.

An underlying assumption of this study was that female aggression cannot be completely understood without knowledge of the context in which the aggression occurs. To gain a greater understanding of female aggression, it was important to gather information from both partners' about that aggression. Most studies typically collect information from only one member of a couple primarily due to financial cost and time constraints (Armstrong et. al., 2002). Therefore, an advantage of this study was that information was gathered from both partners regarding their perception of female aggression and its impact on the relationship. This provided a greater depth of knowledge of the processes that occurred in these relationships. This chapter will link the information gathered to previous research on female aggression as well as discuss the limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

### Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to understand how female aggression impacts couples in situationally violent relationships and to understand the motivations the women use for

aggressing against their male partner. The four couples chosen were categorized as being in situationally violent relationships, and their answers on the CTS indicated that each of the female participants was as physically aggressive, if not more so, than her male partner.

One theme that emerged from this study about female aggression was that all the participants minimized it. However, even though it was often minimized, female aggression impacted the couple relationship by leading to a process where there was an escalation in violence leading to either partner being potentially harmed. Female aggression also becomes a factor in the couples' struggle for power, and it led partners to question their commitment to each other. Another theme was that contextual issues such as substance abuse, family loss, abuse, and mental illness had an impact on female aggression. Motivations for female aggression included: efforts to equalize power, releasing a built up of tension, abandonment, control, retribution, and self-defense.

#### Links with Current Research

The results that stemmed from this study are compared to current research on female aggression. The following sections are: female aggression in IPV; impact of female aggression on couples' relationships; contextual factors; and motivations for aggression.

#### *Female aggression in IPV*

Many of the findings of this study support the literature on the situational couples' violence category created by Johnson (1995). The information gathered from the four couples indicates that the violence is often a result of day to day frustrations, is committed by both partners, and may escalate to mild and moderate violence. While women in this study often had a greater level and intensity of aggression than their partner, often times the violence was bidirectional, in part due to an escalation process which included female

aggression. Research indicates that the consequences for the bidirectional violence may be more severe for women; physically, men tend to be stronger than women, and as a result, there is a higher chance that the female partner will have more severe injuries (Cascardi et al, 1992). However, the results suggest that female aggression towards her male partner not be taken lightly; the women in this study tended to be the primary physical aggressors, and there were times when the female aggression led to potentially serious injuries to their partners. The findings of this study also support research which suggests that women are as likely to engage in relationship violence against their partners as are men (Archer, 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1990).

The findings from this study also indicate that female aggression was often minimized by both partners. The majority of the men reported less violence directed towards them from the female partner than the partner admitted committing. This supports previous research that couples often disagree in their recollection of aggressive acts, and lends support to the theory that men may underreport violence committed against them (Tutty, 1999). It could be that men may minimize female aggression so that they wouldn't look weak that their female partner is physically aggressive towards them.

#### *Impact of female aggression on couple relationship*

Interestingly, although female aggression was minimized, this study suggests that it does play a part in the struggle for power in the relationship. There were times when using physical aggression led to women losing power in the relationship, and times when it led women gaining power; most of the men reported changing their behaviors in order not to trigger her anger. Such a view contradicts theories that suggest domestic violence occurs

solely in a context where women are victims and are powerless to put a stop to the abuse (Barnett et. al., 1997; James, 1999).

The findings also indicate that at times, female aggression leads to an escalation process which could become potentially risky for both men and women. Each couple discussed times where things had escalated to the point someone was mildly injured, and two couples brought up times when the men were seriously injured as a result of the escalation. Research on IPV focuses on the danger women face if there is an escalation of violence, no study brought up the danger men may also face from their female partner (Dasgupta, 1999; Dowd et. al., 2005).

Another prominent theme that emerged from this study was that female aggression led both partners to question their commitment to each other and to the relationship. This didn't necessarily occur directly; oftentimes, female aggression either led to the previously mentioned escalation process, or to one partner leaving as a result of the fighting. This increased feelings of insecurity in the stability of the relationship, which eventually, led to questioning the relationship. No previous research has focused on the role female aggression has on their relationship, and therefore, has not identified that it could impact their commitment to each other.

#### *Contextual factors*

The contextual factors surrounding female aggression were substance abuse, family history of loss and abuse, situational stressors, and mental illness. Two of the couples reported incidents of female aggression which centered around alcohol. This supports research which indicates alcohol use increases the likelihood that aggression will be committed against a partner (Luthra and Gidycz, 20006). In their theoretical framework of

female aggression, Swann and Snow (2006) identified substance use as a predictor of female physical aggression toward her partner. Research by Dowd et. al. (2005) reports that predictors of female aggression include substance abuse and a history of disrupted, which the findings of this study support.

The findings also indicate that contextual factors such as abuse and mental illness impact female aggression. Kim & Capaldi's (2004) study reports that a woman's depressive symptoms predict her aggression towards her partner, which supports the information gathered in the interviews. One couple in the study specifically attributed part of their anger to their mental illness. The findings contradict research which reports that a man's symptoms don't have a significant effect on the physical and psychological aggression women exhibited. It appears that with this couple, his symptoms eventually led to her increased aggression towards him. However, this could also be explained by Kim and Capaldi (2004) who report a male's symptoms of mental illness are a predictor of his own aggression towards his partner; this could escalate to a confrontation which includes female aggression. The study also suggested that a woman's depressive symptoms were a significant predictor for physical and psychological aggression committed against her; the partner of a woman with depressive symptoms may be more likely to be aggressive towards her. The couple in question was the one identified as having a greater amount of male to female aggression than the other couples in the study.

#### *Motivations for female aggression*

The findings contradict research which cites self defense as the primary reason for female aggression towards her partner. Previous research reports that men primarily use violence in order to dominate and control, while woman were more likely to use it to

defend themselves or to retaliate for prior abuse (Barnett et. al., 1997; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Hamberger, Lohr, Bonge, and Tolin, 1997). Instead, within this study, it appears that the primary reasons women aggressed against their partner were due to: a desire to equalize the power in the relationship, to release built up tension, abandonment, wanting control, and retribution. One couple was the exception when they indicated self-defense as a reason for female aggression. This again could be due to the sample population used by previous research; most of the literature stated using court ordered and shelter populations, which Johnson (1995) categorized as having a higher number in the IT category.

The findings support research by Barnett et. al. (1997) which reports that other motivators for female aggression include: wanting to “let out” the violence, getting the other’s attention, and retribution. Although the primary motivator in Barnett et. al.’s (1997) research was self-defense, this could be due to the population that the information was gathered from, which was from domestic violence treatment programs and shelters. As previously mentioned, most of the research didn’t differentiate between the different forms of IPV conceptualized by Johnson (1995), and therefore attribute motivations for female aggression to all domestic violence. This research supports the theory of gender symmetry which conceptualizes different forms of IPV. It appears that Johnson’s (1995) categories of IPV not only differ in the type of violence, but that the women will have motivations other than self-defense for aggression.

By no means does this study imply that male aggression towards his partner is justified due to her aggression towards him. Nor does it dismiss the danger women face as a result of aggression towards them. The few times the men retaliated against their partners supports present research that men’s violence has the potential to lead to a greater

chance of injury than her aggression towards him (Hamberger & Guse, 2002). There was one couple in the study where the woman may have been aggressive due to the physical and emotional abuse meted out against her by her partner. This supports the multiple research studies which report female aggression may be motivated by fear of her partner, or as retaliation for previous abuse (Hamberger et. al, 1997).

Finally, one of the identified motivations in the present study was a desire to equalize the power in the relationship. The women may have felt there was an imbalance of power when their partner: “picked” on them, put them down, and provoked them. This supports research by Bettencourt and Miller (1996) which indicates that when provocation is present, there is a reduction in the gender differences to aggress. This implies that female aggression is more likely to occur when women feel provoked. The findings are also supported by research which indicates women are more likely to be provoked through verbal abuse than physical instigations (White, 1994).

#### Limitations

The qualitative design allowed a greater depth of information to be gathered about female aggression within the context in which it occurred than would have occurred by using survey methods. However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the limitations that were present. One limitation was that by using existing data, there wasn't a choice about changing the questions to focus specifically on female aggression, or to ask questions following up on information participants provided that may have yielded even more information. Gathering the information straight from the source may have led to a greater depth of knowledge since the questions asked would have been tailored with the research in mind.

Another limitation was the small sample size; although this wasn't a quantitative study and wasn't meant to be generalized to all SCV couples, a larger sample may have provided a greater variety of information on female aggression and situational couples violence. However, out of the ten couples who were categorized as situational couples violence, only four appeared to fit into the criteria set forth earlier. Deviating from these requirements would not necessarily have led to a greater knowledge of this type of female aggression.

The four couples that were chosen were all African-American couples, and there may be different social/cultural messages that were not fully explored with the study. Several of the couples brought up race; one stated "can't take advantage of a black woman..." Ideally, it would have been useful to know more about the cultural messages that would lead to such a statement being made, but that information wasn't provided during the interviews. The limitation was in the lack of variation in the sample population; all four belonged to the same racial group.

Previous studies indicate that Black women are more likely to fight back against physical aggression than White women, which has been attributed to a construct that African American women are "strong" and "invulnerable" (Miller, 2001). This strength portrays itself in several ways: one way is that she may decide to fight back against abuse from her partner; another way is that she may decide to stay in an abusive relationship, to show that she is "able to survive difficulties without assistance" (Swan & Snow, 2006). Some literature theorizes that African American relationships are more egalitarian, where there is more equal distribution of child care and household duties (Hampton, Oliver, & Magarian, 2003). This egalitarianism could lead couples to believe that if her partner is

aggressive towards her, she has as much right to be aggressive back (Hampton et. al., 2003; Miller, 2001).

Negative stereotypes prevalent in society include representing African-American women as aggressive, domineering, and manipulative; and characterizing African-American men as “sexually promiscuous, uncooperative, lazy, irresponsible, and violence prone” (Hampton et. al., 2003). This supports how several of the participants in this study characterized their partner. Hampton et. al. (2003) suggest that these “distorted representations” have become accepted to many within the African-American community, and may play out in arguments which lead to IPV in African-American couples.

Another limitation was that all four relationships were relatively short term. Only two of the couples were married, and one for only 6 months. Considering that one of the impacts of female aggression is a questioning of one’s commitment to the relationship, it would have been useful to have gathered information from longer term couples to see if female aggression brought up the same impacts on the relationship.

One of the themes that emerged from the data was that female aggression often led to an escalation process which included male aggression. It would have been useful to have gathered information on how male aggression was impacted by female aggression, since this would have provided a greater knowledge of how female aggression impacted the couple relationship.

### Clinical Implications

A weakness of the CTS is that it doesn’t take into account the context of the IPV situation (Dasgupta, 1999). However, this study not only gathered information about female aggression from the CTS of each partner, but from their interviews as well,

therefore adding to the knowledge about the context in which female aggression occurs. The participants' responses to the qualitative questions provided a great depth of knowledge about female aggression in SCV couples. This study lends itself to the field of marriage and family therapy, since often times couples who attend therapy bring up issues of common couples violence. Knowledge of the impact of female aggression and the motivators could provide therapists with a greater awareness on what to assess when conducting couples counseling with SCV clients. This study also emphasizes that family therapists should assess for female violence since the consequences for female aggression include harm to herself, to her partner, and to the relationship.

This study also encourages therapists to learn and utilize tools such as Negotiated Time Out and Softened start up. Negotiated time out specifically addresses and organizes how a couple may separate for a short amount of time when angry. It does so in such a way that it may alleviate the feelings of abandonment that occur when a partner leaves, and which then led a couple to question their relationship together. The components of this technique include teaching both partners how to negotiate and develop a time-out which works best for them (Rosen, Matheson, Stith, & McCollum, 2003). Softened start up is a tool whose purpose is to organize how a couple starts a potentially conflictual conversation. This softened start up may help in decreasing the amount of times conflict escalates to the point of aggression.

Finally, therapists need to have an awareness of how couples will try to minimize female aggression in the relationship. This minimization was consistently shown when the couples laughed it off, under reported it, and initially negating its impact, and then going

on to describe how it led to further escalation and increased chances that someone could be seriously injured.

### Implications for Future Research

It is clear that more research focusing on female aggression in SCV couples is necessary. While this study brought up themes illustrating the impact on the relationship, it was limited by the sample size and lack of variation across race and relationship length. Further studies with different sample populations could provide different information of the impact of female aggression, as well as the motivations. Such research could also add more information to the field of both female aggression and to the category of SCV relationship.

Further studies focusing on how to treat female aggression are warranted. Currently, female aggression is treated using models that were developed with male aggression in mind. Results reveal that often times the aggression is bidirectional, and that the impact of female aggression may lead to an escalation process which includes increased aggression not only from women, but from men as well. Studies need to then focus on male aggression in SCV relationships to understand more about their aggression, and to find out if current treatment models based off of treatment populations who fit into the IT category are helpful.

Currently, some studies indicate that violence decreases over time (Johnson, 2006). Therefore further longitudinal studies could add information on the course of female aggression as time went on. Additionally, it would be useful to gain knowledge of the long term impacts that aggression has on the relationship. This study indicated that one of the impacts of female aggression was that it led both partners to question their relationship and

their commitment to each other. A longitudinal study could gather information on how often female aggression was a factor with divorces and separations. Finally, more information could be gathered on substance use and its impact on female aggression. While this study indicated that alcohol use was a contextual factor with female aggression, in-depth studies could provide greater knowledge. Ultimately, the field of marriage and family would find it beneficial to have a better understanding of female aggression, and its impact on the couple relationship.

#### Self of the researcher

I was cautious while interpreting the results of this study since the final sample unintentionally ended up being composed of all African-American couples. I attempted to include literature on female aggression in African-American couples after data collection had already commenced, however, as a Middle Eastern single female, I don't claim to understand the dynamics of African-American relationships. There is a possibility that there is a relationship between culture and IPV based on previous research and remarks made by several of the participants. However, I would be circumspect in generalizing this information to all African-American couples.

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## APPENDIX A

Although the following three items refer to marriage, please think of your relationship with your current partner, **whether you are married or not**, as you answer the questions.

### CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER

(A) How satisfied are you with your current marriage or relationship?

<b>Extremely Dissatisfied</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<b>Extremely Satisfied</b>
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(B) How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse or partner?

<b>Extremely Dissatisfied</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<b>Extremely Satisfied</b>
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(C) How satisfied are you with your partner as a spouse or partner?

<b>Extremely Dissatisfied</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<b>Extremely Satisfied</b>
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**How likely is the discussion of a problem to end with ...**

20. Mutual understanding.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

21. Mutual withdrawal.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

22. Mutual resolution.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

23. Mutual withholding of affection.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

24. Mutual reconciliation.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

25. You feeling guilty, your partner feeling hurt.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

26. Your partner feeling guilty, you feeling hurt.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

27. Your partner trying to make up, you withdrawing.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

28. You trying to make up, and your partner withdrawing.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
Very unlikely							Very likely	

Although the following three items refer to marriage, please think of your relationship with your current partner, **whether you are married or not**, as you answer the questions.

## CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER

(1) How satisfied are you with your marriage or relationship?

Very  
Dissatisfied      7      6      5      4      3      2      1      Very  
Satisfied

---

(2) How satisfied are you with your relationship with your children?

Very  
Dissatisfied      7      6      5      4      3      2      1      Very  
Satisfied

If you do not have children please check here ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_

---

(3) How satisfied are you with your children's relationship with each other?

Very  
Dissatisfied      7      6      5      4      3      2      1      Very  
Satisfied

If you have no children, or just one child, please check here ⇒ \_\_\_\_\_

---

(4) Overall, how satisfied are you with your current family relationships?

Very  
Dissatisfied      7      6      5      4      3      2      1      Very  
Satisfied

---

INSTRUCTIONS: Answer the following sets of statements describing the relationship between you and your partner. Please circle the number that best describes **HOW OFTEN** the following statements happen between you and your partner.

**NEVER = 1**

**ALMOST NEVER = 2**

**SOMETIMES = 3**

**ALMOST ALWAYS = 4**

**ALWAYS = 5**

# Me:

1. I show respect for my partner's viewpoints. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I respond to my partner's feelings as if they have no value. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I demonstrate respect for my partner's privacy. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I tell my partner what he/she should be thinking. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I respond to my partner's feelings in an understanding way. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I tell my partner that he/she doesn't mean what he/she is saying. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I show a lack of concern for my partner's feelings. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I encourage my partner to express his/her feelings, bad or good. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I discount my partner's thoughts and opinions. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I show understanding when my partner does not wish to share his/her feelings. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I allow my partner to speak for him/herself. 1 2 3 4 5

INSTRUCTIONS: Answer the following sets of statements describing the relationship between you and your partner. Please circle the number that best describes **HOW OFTEN** the following statements happen between you and your partner.

**NEVER = 1**

**ALMOST NEVER = 2**

**SOMETIMES = 3**

**ALMOST ALWAYS = 4**

**ALWAYS = 5**

## My partner:

1. My partner shows respect for my viewpoints. 1 2 3 4 5
2. My partner responds to my feelings as if they have no value. 1 2 3 4 5
3. My partner demonstrates respect for my privacy. 1 2 3 4 5
4. My partner tells me what I should be thinking. 1 2 3 4 5
5. My partner responds to my feelings in an understanding way. 1 2 3 4 5
6. My partner tells me that I don't mean what I am saying. 1 2 3 4 5
7. My partner shows a lack of concern for my feelings. 1 2 3 4 5
8. My partner encourages me to express my feelings, bad or good. 1 2 3 4 5
9. My partner discounts my thoughts and opinions. 1 2 3 4 5
10. My partner shows understanding when I do not wish to share my feelings. 1 2 3 4 5
11. My partner allows me to speak for myself. 1 2 3 4 5

Instructions: Following are a number of statements about violence toward wives which some people agree with and others disagree with. There are no right or wrong answers.

**“Beating” is used to mean repeated hitting intended to inflict pain.**

**(PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWERS)**

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SCALE TO RATE YOUR ANSWERS:**

**Strongly Agree = 1**

**Agree = 2**

**Slightly Agree = 3**

**Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 4**

**Slightly Disagree = 5**

**Disagree = 6**

**Strongly Disagree = 7**

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  | Social agencies should do more to help battered women.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2.  | There is no excuse for a man beating his wife.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3.  | Wives try to get beaten by their husbands in order to get sympathy from others.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4.  | A woman who constantly refuses to have sex with her husband is asking to be beaten.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5.  | Wives could avoid being battered by their husbands if they knew when to stop talking.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6.  | Episodes of a man beating his wife are the wife's fault.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7.  | Even when women lie to their husbands they do not deserve to get a beating.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8.  | Women should be protected by law if their husbands beat them.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 9.  | Wife-beating should be given high priority as a social problem by government agencies.     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 10. | Sometimes it is OK for a man to beat his wife.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 11. | Women feel pain and no pleasure when beat-up by their husbands.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 12. | A sexually unfaithful wife deserves to be beaten.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 13. | Cases of wife-beating are the fault of the husband.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 14. | Battered wives try to get their partners to beat them as a way to get attention from them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Instructions: Following are a number of statements about violence toward wives which some people agree with and others disagree with. There are no right or wrong answers.

**“Beating” is used to mean repeated hitting intended to inflict pain.**

**(PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWERS)**

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SCALE TO RATE YOUR ANSWERS:**

**Strongly Agree = 1**

**Agree = 2**

**Slightly Agree = 3**

**Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 4**

**Slightly Disagree = 5**

**Disagree = 6**

**Strongly Disagree = 7**

15. Husbands who batter should be responsible for the abuse because they should have foreseen that it would happen. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. If I heard a woman being attacked by her husband, it would be best that I do nothing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Battered wives are responsible for their abuse because they intended it to happen. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. If a wife is beaten by her husband, she should divorce him immediately. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. Husbands who batter are responsible for the abuse because they intended to do it. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. The best way to deal with wife-beating is to arrest the husband. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. Even when a wife's behavior challenges her husband's manhood, he's not justified in beating her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. How long should a man who has beaten his wife spend in prison or jail? (circle one)  
0 1 mo. 6 mos. 1 yr. 3 yrs. 5 yrs. 10 yrs. Don't know
23. When a wife is beaten it is caused by her behavior in the weeks before the battering. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. A wife should move out of the house if her husband beats her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. Wives who are battered are responsible for the abuse because they should have foreseen it would happen. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. A husband has no right to beat his wife even if she breaks agreements she has made with him. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. Occasional violence by a husband toward his wife can help maintain the marriage. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. A wife doesn't deserve a beating even if she keeps reminding her husband of his weak points. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. Most wives secretly desire to be beaten by their husbands. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. If I heard a woman being attacked by her husband, I would call the police. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. It would do some wives some good to be beaten by their husbands. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

On the next page is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have. Please read each one carefully. After you have done so, please circle one of the numbers to the right that best describes **HOW MUCH DISCOMFORT THAT PROBLEM HAS CAUSED YOU DURING THE PAST WEEK INCLUDING TODAY.**

**(PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWERS)**

**Not at All = 0**

**A Little Bit = 1**

**Moderately = 2**

**Quite a Bit = 3**

**Extremely = 4**

**HOW MUCH WERE YOU DISTRESSED BY:**

1.	Loss of sexual interest or pleasure.	0	1	2	3	4
2.	Feeling low in energy or slowed down.	0	1	2	3	4
3.	Thoughts of ending your life.	0	1	2	3	4
4.	Crying easily.	0	1	2	3	4
5.	Feelings of being trapped or caught.	0	1	2	3	4
6.	Blaming yourself for things.	0	1	2	3	4
7.	Feeling lonely.	0	1	2	3	4
8.	Feeling blue.	0	1	2	3	4
9.	Worrying too much about things.	0	1	2	3	4
10.	Feeling no interest in things.	0	1	2	3	4
11.	Feeling hopeless about the future.	0	1	2	3	4
12.	Feeling everything is an effort.	0	1	2	3	4
13.	Feelings of worthlessness.	0	1	2	3	4
14.	Nervousness or shakiness inside.	0	1	2	3	4
15.	Trembling.	0	1	2	3	4
16.	Suddenly scared for no reason.	0	1	2	3	4
17.	Feeling fearful.	0	1	2	3	4
18.	Heart pounding or racing.	0	1	2	3	4
19.	Feeling tense or keyed up.	0	1	2	3	4
20.	Spells of terror or panic.	0	1	2	3	4
21.	Feeling so restless you couldn't sit still.	0	1	2	3	4
22.	The feeling that something bad is going to happen to you.	0	1	2	3	4
23.	Thoughts and images of a frightening nature.	0	1	2	3	4

The following is a list of things that couples do not always agree on. For each of them, please tell how often you and your partner agreed during the past year.

**(PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER)**

**Always = 1**

**Almost Always = 2**

**Usually = 3**

**Sometimes = 4**

**Never = 5**

1. Managing the money.	1	2	3	4	5
------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

2. Cooking, cleaning, or repairing the house.	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

3. Social activities and entertaining.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

4. Affection and sex relations.	1	2	3	4	5
---------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

5. If applicable, things about the children.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Instructions: Following are a number of statements about violence toward husbands which some people agree with and others disagree with. There are no right or wrong answers.

## **(PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWERS)**

**PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SCALE TO RATE YOUR ANSWERS:**

**Strongly Agree = 1**

**Agree = 2**

**Slightly Agree = 3**

**Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 4**

**Slightly Disagree = 5**

**Disagree = 6**

**Strongly Disagree = 7**

1. There is no excuse for a woman hitting her husband. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. A man who constantly insults his wife is asking to be slapped. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Husbands could avoid being slapped by their wives if they knew when to stop talking. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Episodes of a woman hitting her husband are the husband's fault. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Even when men lie to their wives they do not deserve to get hit. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Sometimes it is OK for a woman to beat her husband. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. A sexually unfaithful husband deserves to be hit. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. If a husband is beaten by his wife, he should divorce her immediately. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. A husband should move out of the house if his wife hits him. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Husbands who are hit are responsible for the abuse because they should have foreseen it would happen. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. A wife has no right to hit her husband even if he breaks agreements he has made with her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. It would do some husbands some good to be slapped by their wives. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## Attitudes and Behaviors Survey

Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements. Base your responses on you're feeling and acting NOW. Please answer using a 5-point scale with 1= Strongly disagree to 5= Strongly agree.

**1 = Strongly disagree**

**2 = Disagree**

**3 = No opinion**

**4 = Agree**

**5 = Strongly agree**

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. There's nothing I can do to end the violence in my relationship.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I'm beginning to see that the violence in my relationship is a problem.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Although I haven't been violent in a while, I know it's possible for me to be violent again.                                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I'm actively working on ending the violence in my relationship.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I wish I had more ideas about how to end the violence in my relationship.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I'm actually doing something to stop my violent behavior, not just thinking about it.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. The violence in my relationship isn't a big deal.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I've ended the violence, but sometimes still struggle with the old urges that allowed the violence to happen in the first place. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. It's OK to use violence as long as you don't hurt anyone.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I'm at a point in my life where I'm beginning to feel the harmful impact of my violent behavior.                                | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. I've made some changes and ended the violence, but I'm afraid of going back to the way I was before.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. Although at times it's difficult, I'm working on ending my violent behavior in my relationship.                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. More and more I'm seeing how my violence hurts my partner.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. I'm finally doing something to end the violence.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. There's no way I can control my violent impulses.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I've been pretty successful in leading a violence-free life, but there are still times when I'm tempted to resort to violence.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I'm making important changes and ending the violence in my life.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. More and more I'm realizing that my violence is wrong.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. Although I've made the changes necessary to lead a violence-free life, there are still times when I'm tempted to use violence.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. I don't see the point of focusing on the violence in my relationship.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |

# (PLEASE CIRCLE ANSWER)

Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test  
(MAST; Selzer, 1971)

Please respond YES or NO to the following questions about your drinking habits **in the last six months.**

1. Do you feel you are a normal drinker (by *normal* we mean you drink *less than* or *as much as* most other people)? YES NO
2. Does your wife, husband, a parent, or other near relative ever worry or complain about your drinking? YES NO
3. Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking? YES NO
4. Do friends or relatives think you are a normal drinker? YES NO
5. Are you able to stop drinking when you want to? YES NO
6. Have you ever attended a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)? YES NO
7. Has drinking ever created problems between you and your wife, husband, a parent, or other near relative? YES NO
8. Have you ever gotten into trouble at work because of drinking? YES NO
9. Have you ever neglected your obligations, your family, or your work for two or more days in a row because you were drinking? YES NO
10. Have you ever gone to anyone for help about your drinking? YES NO
11. Have you ever been in a hospital because of drinking? YES NO
12. Have you ever been arrested for drunken driving, driving while intoxicated, or driving under the influence of alcoholic beverages? YES NO
13. Have you ever been arrested, even for a few hours, because of other drunk behavior? YES NO



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions for Couples Conflict Study: Her

#### I. How does she describe the relationship? (warm up; 1<sup>st</sup> 5 minutes)

- When you think about your relationship to \_\_\_\_\_(partner) what's the first thing that comes to your mind?
- What's the best/worst thing about your relationship right now?

#### II. Negotiation and conflict resolution process (15 min)

- *Think about the conflict that you and \_\_\_\_\_ have*, what do you tend to have conflict about?
- *Think about times when you have conflict about \_\_\_\_\_* (as mentioned above), what happens? What do you do, what does he do? (process)
- *Still thinking about the times when you and \_\_\_\_\_ are in conflict*, how would you prefer a conflict situation to go ? What do you think is going on that you handle it this way instead of another way?
- What, if anything, has changed about the way you and your partner deal with conflict since you were first together? What do you think accounts for the change?
- Does how you and \_\_\_\_\_ (partner) handle conflict remind you of how your parents disagreed when you were growing up?

#### III. Use of and motivation for using power, control, coercion (20 min)

- *Think about a time when you want to do something one way and \_\_\_\_\_ wants to do it another:* How do you try to influence him? How does he respond to that? What happens when its something you both feel really strongly about?
- *Think about a time when he wants you to do something his way* What does he do to try to get you to do it his way? How do respond?
- What, if any, changes have there been to the way you try to influence each other since you were first together?
- Have you ever felt that he tried to force you to do something (bully)? What was that like? What happened?
- *If yes to above* When did this type of behavior first begin in your relationship? What do you think brought about the change? What do you think is going on with him when he tries to bully you?

- Do you ever feel like \_\_\_\_\_ tries to control you? If yes, how does that work? What does he do that makes you feel controlled? Is this similar to or different from experiences you have had in past relationships?
- Do you ever try to control him? How does that work?

**IV. Making sense of the violence. (20 min)**

- When there has been some pushing or shoving (etc), who is more likely to start it? How does it usually end? When did the first incident happen? How did it evolve from there? During these times how often are you or \_\_\_\_\_ using alcohol or another drug?
- *Think about a time when you have gotten physical with \_\_\_\_\_. [pushed; shoved; grabbed]:* What do you think was going on with you? What makes you decide to be violent? What do you want to see happen?
- *Think about an incident when he has gotten physical with you.* What do you think was going on for him? Why do you think he get to that point? Why do you think he chooses to be violent?
- What impact does it have on you when things get physical? How does it affect your relationship, level of commitment; what do you think it means?

**V. Intersections of race and gender (minority participants). (10 minutes)**

- What messages did you get growing up about how to deal with conflict in a relationship? Do you think those messages were culturally based or mainly messages that came from within your own family?
- What messages did you get growing up about Black womanhood -- what it means to be a black woman? How does this image “play out” in your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

**LAST QUESTION AND CLOSING PROCEDURE:**

- Well those are all the questions I have for you, but I wonder if there is anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't discussed?
- **Close with appreciation:** I want to thank you for your time. You've provided some very important insights that will be useful in helping couples deal with conflict.
- Give participant \$\$\$
- Thank you again. I really appreciate your help.

**Interview Questions for Couples Conflict Study: Him**

**I. How does he describe the relationship? (warm up; 1<sup>st</sup> 5 minutes)**

- When you think about your relationship to \_\_\_\_\_(partner) what's the first thing that comes to your mind?
- What's the best/worst thing about your relationship right now?

**II. Negotiation and conflict resolution process (15 min)**

- *Think about the conflict that you and \_\_\_\_\_ have, what do you tend to have conflict about?*
- *Think about times when you have conflict about \_\_\_\_\_ (as mentioned above), what happens? What do you do, what does she do?*
- *Still thinking about the times when you and \_\_\_\_\_ are in conflict, how would you prefer a conflict situation to go? What do you think is going on that you handle it this way instead of another way?*
- What, if anything, has changed about the way you and \_\_\_\_\_ deal with conflict since you were first together? What do you think accounts for the change?
- Does how you and \_\_\_\_\_ handle conflict remind you of how your parents disagreed when you were growing up?

**III. Use of and motivation for using power, control, coercion (20 min)**

- *Think about a time when you want to do something one way and \_\_\_\_\_ wants to do it another: How do you try to influence her? How does she respond? What happens when its something you both feel really strongly about?*
- *Think about a time when she wants you to do something her way What does she do to try to get you to do it her way? How do you respond?*
- What, if any, changes have there been in the way you try to influence each other since you were first together?
- Have you ever felt that she tried to force you to do something (bully)? What was that like? What happened?
- *If yes to above* When did this type of behavior first begin in your relationship? What do you think brought about the change? What do you think is going on with her when she tries to force you?

- Do you ever feel like \_\_\_\_\_ tries to control you? If yes, how does that work? What does she do that makes you feel controlled? Is this similar to or different from experiences you have had in past relationships?
- Do you ever try to control her? How does that work?

**IV. Making sense of the violence. (20 min)**

- When there has been some pushing or shoving (etc), who is more likely to start it? How does it usually end? When did the first incident happen? How did it evolve from there? During these times, how often are you or \_\_\_\_ using alcohol or another drug?
- *Think about a time when you have gotten physical with \_\_\_\_\_. [pushed; shoved; grabbed]:* What do you think was going on with you? What makes you decide to be violent? What do you want to see happen?
- *Think about an incident when she got physical with you.* What do you think was going on for her? Why do you think she choose to be violent?
- What impact does it have on you when things get physical? How does it affect your relationship, level of commitment? What do you think it means?

**V. Intersections of race and gender (minority participants). (10 minutes)**

- What messages did you get growing up about how to deal with conflict in a relationship? Do you think those messages were culturally based or mainly messages that came from within your own family?
- What messages do/did you get growing up about Black manhood/what it means to be a black man? How does this image “play out” in your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

**LAST QUESTION AND CLOSING PROCEDURE:**

- Well those are all the questions I have for you, but I wonder if there is anything else you'd like to tell me that we haven't discussed?
- Close with appreciation: I want to thank you for your time. You've provided some very important insights that will be useful in helping couples deal with conflict.
- Give participant \$\$\$
- Thank you again. I really appreciate your help.