LEAVING EXPERIENCES OF SURVIVORS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
IN EMERGENCY SHELTER AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

by

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Leaving Experiences of Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence
in Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive public health problem across the United States disproportionately affecting women and children. IPV has four primary categories of violence: physical, sexual, stalking, and psychological aggression. This dissertation utilized an interpretative phenomenological as well as a directed content analysis approaches to better understand leaving experiences of survivors of IPV.

The study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 19 survivors of IPV who had left an abusive relationship and were living in either an emergency shelter or transitional housing. Participants were recruited from several domestic violence agencies. Interpretative phenomenology served as the framework for understanding the data for the first research question. All interviews were examined using van Manen's (1997) approach to human science research analysis. Using transtheoretical model of change (TMC), social exchange theory (SET), and internal and external factors as found in the literature pertaining to leaving a violent relationship, the researcher used directed content analysis as a guided approach for the second, third, and fourth research questions. The goal of using a directed content analysis approach is to substantiate an existing theoretical framework.

One of the primary themes that emerged from these interviews was there are several

indicators that the participants described that contribute to violence, resiliency, and leaving the relationship. As advocates working with survivors of IPV become more knowledgeable about these indicators, they can be better equipped to prepare survivors for the leaving process. In addition, this study substantiated the use of both TMC and SET as a foundation for working with survivors throughout the leaving process. Additionally, many of the internal and external factors that play a role in the leaving process were also validated through the participants' stories. Recommendations from this research for social work practice and education as well as proposals for future research inquiries are described.

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Throughout my four years at the University of Texas at Arlington, I have been incredibly grateful to have both Drs. Mitschke and Black as close advisors and mentors. While I could list Dr. Mitschke's many professional attributes (her unique and innovative teaching methods for example) as foundational to my own development as a scholar, it is her tireless dedication to student success that serves as a constant reminder of why I pursued my research work at UTA. Dr. Black's passion for feminist studies, teen dating violence, and commitment to her students is inspiring, as I fall well short of properly describing how much I've learned from her. They have made all the difference.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. A special feeling of appreciation to my loving parents whose unending words of inspiration and push for tenacity ring in my ears. My mother, Diane Hawley, is my rock and inspiration who continuously teaches me the value of education and critical thought. My father, Bobby Hawley, has always been my source of laughter and love. Both of my parents have always loved me unconditionally and whose good examples have taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve. I also owe much gratitude to my sister, my brother, my extended family (particularly my Uncle Jay for his wonderful assistance), my relatives, and my PhD program peers for their steadfast support and prayers.

Drawing on feminist theories, I can't help but acknowledge two monumental women who have modeled strength and determination throughout my life. I also dedicate this dissertation to my incredibly resilient, kind-hearted, and inspiring grandmothers Gail Ackall and Gwen Hawley who have both been strong pillars of faith and unwavering love.

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Finally, I want thank the survivors who participated in this study, as without them, this project would have never been possible. Their strength and resilience empowers me to push on and advocate for them as best I can. With courage, they told their stories. I consider it a tremendous privilege and responsibility to represent those stories and the valuable lessons here. I hope that my work brings honor to their lives and memories.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread public health problem across the United States. In 2010, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) confirmed that more than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) experience some form of physical or sexual assault and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). Due to the nature of IPV, it is often an underreported crime (Black et al., 2011; Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, 2015; Browne, 1993; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Furthermore, an estimated 1.3 million women reported being sexually assaulted within the past 12 months and 22 million within their lifetime within the United States (Black et al., 2011). A convincing majority (85%) of survivors of IPV are females who have been abused by a male partner (Black et al., 2011). It is important to acknowledge, however, that IPV can occur in both heterosexual and same-sex couples (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). In a report by the CDC, researchers argue that the scope of IPV is difficult to capture for several reasons. The lack of consistency in IPV terminology is one of the primary reasons IPV is challenging to measure. Other challenges include: a lack of consistency in methodology, holes in collecting data, a survivor's disinclination to disclose the abuse, and survey limitations of self-reporting data (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). Because the present study specifically investigates heterosexual female survivors of IPV with male intimate partners, the pronouns used in this study will reflect female survivors of violence and male abusers of violence.

IPV Terminology and Definitions

Intimate partner violence, domestic violence, spousal abuse, battering, domestic abuse, and intimate terrorism, are all terms that have been used to classify IPV, and there are many varying definitions of IPV. Specificity of terminology is fundamental in interpreting the pervasiveness, patterns, causes, and consequences of emotional, physical, and sexual violence. Moreover, the terminology used has changed throughout the years. In an article by Straus and Gelles (1986), the researchers discuss the changes in family violence throughout the years. Originally termed "wife beating," a husband in 1768 had the legal right to chastise his wife. Terminology then shifted to spousal abuse and battering with the development of the "battered woman syndrome" established by Walker in 1979.

Walker (1979) defined a battered woman as "a woman who is repeatedly subjected to any forceful physical or psychological behavior by a man in order to coerce her to do something he wants to do without any concern for her rights" (p. xv). IPV terminology has changed with the progress in defining and identifying IPV within society. IPV definitions differ in their identification of specific acts that are included in the definition, as well as the various relationship types that might be classified as "intimate." For example, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) currently defines IPV as "physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner (i.e., spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, dating partner, or ongoing sexual partner)" (Breiding et al., 2015, p. 11). The CDC definition of IPV varies greatly from Walker's 1979 definition, as it includes sexual violence and stalking as well as the identification of past and/or present, gender-neutral partners or spouses. The myriad of complex relationships that typify modern American society add more confusion with regard to IPV definitions and terminology with the various definitions

of "intimate." Individuals may consider a perpetrator an acquaintance, friend, hookup, or a dating partner. Can these relationships also be characterized as intimate partnerships? Moreover, Stylianou, Postmus, and McMahon (2013), argue that economic abuse also has unique and distinct constructs that make economic abuse its own form of abuse, in addition to physical, sexual, stalking, and psychological. Considered a form of psychological abuse by many, economic abuse is defined as "behaviors that control a women's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources" (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008, p. 573). A great deal of research has been done on the prevalence and impact of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, but economic abuse has received far less attention. A study done by Anderson, Gillig, Sitaker, McCloskey, Malloy, and Grigsby (2003), found that 45.9% of the survivors surveyed indicated that money played a significant role in their ability to leave a relationship.

Additionally, Johnson (2008) suggests using the terminology "intimate terrorism" instead of IPV. Johnson believes that the reasons for breaking IPV into smaller sub-categories pertain to the various patterns of behavior and control. He stated that intimate terrorism is typically what people think of when they think of IPV or "domestic violence" but he also differentiates three more different types of violence and control – violent resistance, situational couple violence, and mutual violence resistance. Johnson (2008) wrote that intimate terrorism occurs when one partner uses violence and controlling behavior over their partner. Johnson (2008) states, "intimate terrorism is violence embedded in a general pattern of coercive control" (p. 2-3). Johnson's typology of IPV provides an all-inclusive framework for understanding the continuum of violence and controlling experiences that occurs within relationships. Johnson's framework also gives social workers a shared language to describe the variety of violence that exists within

their client systems; further research can ultimately help to guide the development and implementation of more responsive interventions.

Types of violence. The CDC describes IPV as having four primary categories of violence: physical, sexual, stalking, and psychological aggression (Breiding et al., 2015). Physical violence consists of using aggressive force against a partner that has the potential to cause death, disability, injury, or harm. Examples of physical violence include, but are not limited to: striking (with or without an object), hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, strangling, kicking, pinching, burning, utilizing physical restraints, force-feeding, and physical punishment of any kind. It is estimated that in the United States approximately 20 people are physically assaulted each minute (Black et al., 2011).

Sexual violence is a sexual act that is committed or attempted by another person without the victim's consent or against someone who is unable to give consent (Breiding et al., 2015). Sexual violence, also commonly known as rape, also includes forced sexual acts under which the survivor was unable to give consent due to forced or unforced alcohol or drug use. Additionally, sexual violence includes forced sexual acts and penetration by an individual with a third party. Additional reasons a victim may not be able to give consent include, "victim's age, illness, mental or physical disability, being asleep or unconscious, or being too intoxicated (e.g., incapacitation, lack of consciousness, or lack of awareness) through their voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol or drugs," and finally due to an inability to be able to refuse the sexual act due to the use of weapons or threats of violence (Breiding et al., 2015, p.11-12). The results of The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that one in five women, or approximately 22 million women, experience sexual violence in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). The survey also found that "More than three-quarters of female victims of completed rape

(79.6%) were first raped before their 25th birthday, with 42.2% experiencing their first completed rape before the age of 18" (Black et al., 2011, p. 25).

The difficulty with maintaining a standardized definition and terminology of IPV is further complicated by technology, which has altered the manner in which individuals meet and interact with one another online. Furthermore, the online sphere and other technologies opens the door for signifcantly more cyber victimizations, or cyber stalking, either online or through email, text messages, phone calls, etc. The various forms of cyber victimization that exist today did not exist at the onset of IPV research. Stalking, and particularly cyber stalking, is becoming more and more prevalent in society between intimate partners. Research and statistics on stalking victimization rates have increased throughout the years. Research has found that one in six women (approximately 16%) in the United States have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetime in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed. Additionally, approximately 66% of female victims of stalking were stalked by a current or former intimate partner (Black, et al., 2011).

Black et al. (2011) state:

> The higher prevalence estimates in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey may largely be due to the inclusion of stalking tactics related to newer technologies (e.g., persistent cell phone texting) that did not exist as a stalking modality when some of the previous studies were conducted. Cell phone ownership has grown tremendously in the last several years. Furthermore, advancements in wireless technology have led to Internet access that is no longer dependent upon the use of home or business computers. For many people, these technologies provide greater convenience and easier

accessibility to others; however, this growth in technology may have also increased the ease of engaging in certain stalking behaviors. (p. 84)

Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, and Tucker (2007) utilized the term "stalking with technology" which "indicates stalking with any of a wide variety of information-based technologies" (p. 844). Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Frasher, and Tucker (2007) identify the following technological devices that can be utilized to stalk: telephone technologies, caller identification, fax machines, TTY and TTD, calling cards, cordless telephones, cellular and wireless telephones, GPS and location services, spy ware software and keystroke logging hardware, hidden cameras, online databases, and information brokers. As technology grows and changes, further research and understanding of stalking with technologies is needed.

Stalking consists of unwanted attention that causes the survivor to fear for their safety. The stalking behavior occurs over a pattern of time against the survivor. Additionally, the survivor may fear for the safety of other individuals such as family members or friends due to the stalking behavior. Examples of stalking include, but are not limited to: repeatedly calling, text messaging, emailing, and instant messaging the survivor when she does not want it, appearing at places without the survivor's knowledge or consent such as school or work, and spying on the survivor or family members and friends of the survivor from a distance. Stalking can be criminally enforced if the survivor is fearful, experiences stalking multiple times, and believes that they or someone close to them may be in danger or harmed due to the abuser's behavior (Breiding et al., 2015). Stalking has become a significantly complicated legal matter as well (Owens, 2015).

While each of these behaviors individually are not criminal in nature, the collective, repeated acts of these activities constitute stalking (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). Most

stalking legislation requires three components: a pattern of behavior focused at one specific person, behavior that deliberately places that person in fear for his or her safety, and conduct that actually places that person in fear for his or her safety (Beatty, 2003). Owens' (2015) research pertains to the nature of fear, and specifically the difference between subjective fears versus reasonable fear. Subjective fear is the survivor's interpretation of fear, whereas reasonable fear pertains to whether or not "in a court of law, a victim could show how another rational person would be similarly fearful" (p. 4).

Finally, the CDC defines psychological abuse as another form of violence by a partner that consists of "verbal or non-verbal communication with the intent to: a) harm another person mentally or emotionally, and/or b) exert control over another person " by the abuser (Breiding et al., 2015, p. 15). By using threatening words, gestures, or weapons, a partner can intimidate the survivor. Psychological abuse does not consist of physical violence, but are rather covert and manipulative acts that are intended to ultimately damage the survivor's self-esteem and self-worth. Psychological or emotional abuse consists of repeated acts of psychological aggression such as humiliating the survivor, controlling what she does, withholding information from her, isolating her from family and friends, and other tactics to make the survivor feel diminished and/or embarrassed. Additionally, psychological abuse includes, but is not limited to: humiliating the victim, calling her names, making her feel guilty, playing mind games, and controlling her behavior (Breiding et al., 2015; Black et al., 2011).

The CDC addresses the need to maintain consistency in IPV terminology and definitions for research and comparability factors. The primary reason consistency is needed in operationalizing the problem is to collect accurate statistics and data in a methodical manner. Without accurate data, society cannot determine what response is needed to intervene and

prevent the problem. Additionally, an unreliable definition limits society's ability to target high-risk groups as well as be able to monitor changes in the number of incidents and prevalence. Finally, a standard definition allows for the ability to compare data among various geographic areas as well as the ability to monitor data and trends over time (Breiding et al., 2015).

   IPV constructs. Regardless of the terminology used to identify intimate partner violence, experts in this subject area agree that the dual constructs of power and control are inherent in the field. Within the field of IPV, there exists the Power and Control Wheel model for IPV curriculum in agency settings, which is a standard practice for both batterer's intervention programs as well as survivor support groups (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 1984). Staff members at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, MN initially developed the Power and Control Wheel in 1984. While some argue that the efficacy of the Power and Control Wheel is invalid because of the lack of evidence used to develop it (Corvo, Dutton, & Wan-Yi, 2009), the wheel nonetheless is the prevailing tool used within the IPV field that depicts the tactics that an abuser uses to gain power and control over his intimate partner (Edleson, & Tolman, 1992; Pence, & Paymar, 1993; Yllö, & Bograd, 1988). The Power and Control Wheel (Figure 1) is broken up into eight sections: using intimidation, using emotional abuse, using isolation, minimizing, denying, and blaming, using children, using male privilege, using economic abuse, and using coercion and threats (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 1984). The Power and Control Wheel specifically identifies areas the abuser may try to use to manipulate his partner. Johnson (2008) includes many of the same tactics in his description of strategies abusers use in intimate terror situations.

Figure 1. Power and control wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 1984).

The Power and Control Wheel specifically identifies areas the abuser may try to use to manipulate his partner. Furthermore, the Power and Control Wheel identifies strategies that abusers utilize in order to maintain dominance over an intimate partner.

Risk Factors for Victimization

In a systematic review conducted by Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and. Kim (2012), researchers explored the risk factors associated with IPV victimization. Risk factors included those elements that predicted IPV in adult and adolescent relationships. The demographic risk factors are described within the following categories: age, gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, acculturation, and stress.

Age. Researchers found that age acts as a protective factor against IPV, which indicates that young adults are at higher risk of experiencing IPV (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim, 2012). Durose and colleagues (2005) found that the average age of family violence victimization is 34 and that two-thirds of survivors of family violence are between the ages 25 and 54. In a report by the U.S. Department of Justice (2014), women between the ages of 18-24 were at the highest risk of experiencing IPV. In a study by Rodriguez, Lasch, Chandra, and Lee (2001), researchers found that age significantly reduced the likelihood of violent arguments. Furthermore, researchers found that "involvement in perpetration, victimization, and mutual violence was associated with younger age for both men and women" (Caetano, Vaeth, & Ramisetty-Mikler, 2008, p. 511).

Gender. Females consist of a larger percentage of victims of family violence crimes compared to their male counterparts. At the time of the 2005 study conducted by Durose and colleagues, women consisted of 51.6% of the total population but made up 73.4% of victims of family violence. Similarly, females made up 50% of spouses, romantic partners, and girlfriends, yet incurred 84.3% of abuse by their partner (Durose et al., 2005). Women were found to be considerably more likely than men to report being victims of intimate partner violence whether it is rape, physical assault, or stalking and whether the timeframe is the person's lifetime or the past 12 months (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000c). As previously stated, there is some inconsistency in the literature about whether or not males or females are more violent in a relationship. Data collected by the CDC consistently shows that approximately 22% of females and 14% of males in the United States experience some form of physical violence by an intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2015). Other studies, on the other hand, have reported, "findings indicated that the young women were more likely than the men to initiate physical aggression at late adolescence. However, by

the mid-20s in early adulthood there were no significant sex differences in initiation rates"

(Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007, p. 101). Additionally, in a systematic review of the literature,

Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) found that women have slightly higher rates of violence

than men, however, men held higher rates of violence when you factor in severity and likelihood

to result in injury. Johnson's (2008) argument regarding differences in violence rates between

men and women would be that studies investigate different facets of violence, specifically

situational couple violence, in which one partner is violent, not intimate terrorism in which a

partner is violently controlling of the other.

Socioeconomic status. There are conflicting reports regarding IPV and socioeconomic

status. Several studies have found that there is a strong correlation between IPV victimization

and lower socioeconomic status (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer,

2002; Salmi, & Danielsson, 2014; Thompson et al., 2006). Thompson et al. (2006) found that

families with a lower socioeconomic status (less than $25,000) were 2.5 times more likely to be

victims of IPV than families making more than $25,000. While many studies indicate that

findings for education indicate some association with socioeconomic status, Cunradi, Caetano,

and Schafer (2002) found that income made a greater contribution to the likelihood of IPV

victimization than education or employment categories. Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012)

also found that unemployment and low income are stronger and more robust demographic risk

factors for IPV than education level.

Several studies utilize social structural theory as a catalyst for explaining the relationship

between lower socioeconomic status and IPV victimization. Researchers argue that a lower

socioeconomic status and IPV victimization is mediated through stress on an individual and

familial level. Because poverty is fundamentally stressful on a family, some researchers have

concluded that IPV may occur as a result of the stress of poverty (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002; Salmi, & Danielsson, 2014). Furthermore, many of the studies indicate that their sample consisted of lower socioeconomic participants and may not truly represent national statistics (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002; Salmi, & Danielsson, 2014; Thompson et al., 2006).

Race/ethnicity. There are a number of discrepancies in the research related to IPV and ethnicity. Tjaden and Thoennes (2000a) found no significant difference in prevalence between White and Nonwhite survivors of IPV. In a national, quantitative study with 3568 participants, researchers also found no correlation between any specific race and IPV (Thompson, Bonomi, & Anderson, 2006). Conversely, in a systematic review of the literature, Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) concluded that "the weight of findings indicate that being a member of a minority group is a risk factor for IPV, with findings of greater risk being most consistent for African Americans" (p. 8). Similarly, Catalano, Smith, Snyder, and Rand (2009), found that African American females have traditionally experienced IPV at higher rates than White females. Furthermore, Cateano, Field, Ramisetty-Mikler, and McGrath (2005) found that "the rate of recurrence for severe IPV among Black and Hispanic couples is 6 and 4 times higher, respectively, than the rate among Whites. The results suggest that Blacks and Hispanics may be more affected by IPV" (p. 1039). Durose et al. (2005) found that both Whites and Blacks were more likely to be victimized than Hispanics with 74% of family violence victims being non-Hispanic whites. Ultimately, further research is needed in order to determine how much of the difference in IPV rates among different racial and ethnic backgrounds can be explained by ethnic and/or cultural influences and environmental factors.

Stress. In a systematic review of risk factors for IPV victimization, Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) also identify stress, specifically economic and community stress, as risk factors for IPV. In a study done by Smith Slep, Foran, Heyman, and Snarr (2010) researchers found that after controlling for many factors, economic stress in the family was found to be a predictor of IPV victimization within an active duty Air Force sample. Furthermore, Probst et al. (2008) found that parental stress, such as having three or more children in the home and having children ages 12-17, increased the odds of violent arguments between parents. It is evident that various forms of stress, such as economic, community, and parenting, are predictive of IPV.

In addition to the various risk factors of IPV, more research is needed on not only these elements but also the chronological timeline of events that unfolds for a survivor. The Cycle of Violence Theory in which Walker (1979) proposes a cycle of abuse that contains three stages. The stages include: "the tension-building phase; the explosion or acute battering incident; and the calm, loving respite" (p. 55). This consistent cycle is repeated over time and survivors often identify the phases they are in and random or constant violence is not the norm for an abusive relationship. This chronological cycle occurs for various durations. By looking at not only the risk factors, but also the chronological processes that a survivor goes through in an abusive relationship, we will be better equipped to assist survivors through this progression.

Consequences of IPV

In addition to understanding the risk factors as well as overall impact of IPV, it is also important to comprehend the immense number of consequences that IPV has on society both on a micro and a macro level. Consequences on the macro level include the financial impact on society and the criminal justice impact. Micro-level consequences of IPV include the health impact on survivors and children. By recognizing the consequences of IPV, society can be better

informed on the widespread impact that IPV has as well as become more informed on how to avoid the problem, and therefore the consequences of the problem.

      Financial/economic impact. The financial/economic impact of IPV on society includes various costs such as the medical treatment of physical injuries, mental health services for the emotional impact of the abuse, productivity losses associated with time off from work due to the physical and emotional injuries, and job loss as a result of reduction in performance. According to the CDC, $5.8 billion is spent each year on IPV related incidents. Approximately $4.1 billion of that cost specifically pertains to direct healthcare costs – both medical and mental health costs (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). In a study by Max, Rice, and Finkelstein (2004) researchers estimate the cost of IPV (including sexual assault, physical abuse, stalking, and murder) to be upwards of $8.3 billion. By utilizing data from the National Violence Against Women Survey, Max, Rice, and Finkelstein (2004) evaluate the costs of the following: medical care (including ER visits, outpatient visits, hospital stays, physician visits, dental visits, ambulance/paramedic costs, and physical therapy visits), mental health care, value of lost productivity, and mortality costs. The researchers' assessment of the total cost of sexual assaults is $320 million, $4.2 billion for physical violence, $342 million for stalking, and $893 million for IPV murders. Additional costs that need to be considered when understanding the economic impact of IPV include not only medical care and mental health care, but also police services, social services, and legal services as well as the economic costs on survivors and their families. IPV survivors also incur other financial costs such as loss of work and childcare costs. In a study conducted by Arias and Corso (2005) researchers found that the average cost in productivity losses was $257 per female survivor who experienced IPV. There are several barriers in estimating costs of IPV such as a survivor's fear of retribution, a survivor's embarrassment, and

a survivor's dependence on the perpetrator. In order to gather more complete financial estimates regarding the economic impact of IPV, further research and analysis is needed.

Criminal justice impact. In order to better understand the consequences that IPV has on the criminal justice system, this category can be broken up into law enforcement impact and prosecution impact. Additionally a complete understanding of the impact IPV has on the criminal justice system is difficult due the varying laws from state to state. Miller (2004) outlines some of the challenges with varying legislation from state to state. An offender may be charged with a felony after a single domestic violence misdemeanor conviction in nine states; after a second domestic violence misdemeanor conviction, an offender is treated as a felon in seven states; and finally in 18 states, an offender is considered a felon after three domestic violence misdemeanor convictions. In addition, "13 states now provide enhanced penalties when domestic violence is committed in the presence of a minor, and 3 states provide enhanced penalties for domestic violence assaults on a pregnant woman" (Miller, 2004, p. 15-16). These disparities from state to state make analyzing the impact IPV has on the criminal justice system even more convoluted.

Law enforcement impact. An understanding of the criminal justice impact must begin with the acceptance that not all IPV cases are reported to the police. In a report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (Durose et al., 2005), approximately 60% family violence incidents were reported to the police. The most common reason individuals gave for not reporting the incidents was because it was a "private matter" and that they did not want to involve others (Durose et al., 2005). According to a 2005 report by the U.S. Department of Justice, Family violence accounted for 33% of all violent crimes recorded by police and 49% of those law enforcement cases resulted in an arrest of an abuser, with 77% of them being male offenders.

Acts of IPV take up a significant amount of time and resources for law enforcement officers throughout the U. S.

Prosecution impact. After the law enforcement officer's involvement, then many times the case continues in to the prosecution and court processing system. In a study of 1,500 offenders of IPV, approximately one third were convicted of family violence. Additionally, 83% of the state courts sentenced convicted IPV offenders to prison or jail (Durose et al., 2005).

Impact on women's physical and mental health. Coker et al. (2002) conducted research of the health impacts IPV has on both men and women survivors. Results found that IPV was significantly associated with an increased risk of poor health, depressive symptoms, substance use, and the development of a chronic disease, mental illness, and injury (Coker et al., 2002). A significant number of survivors of IPV were identified as having PTSD as a result of the IPV (Astin, Lawrence, & Foy, 1993). Bonomi et al. (2006) also reported that women who experienced IPV faced significantly higher rates of severe depressive symptoms when compared to women who had not experienced IPV. Additionally, survivors of IPV also described a higher number of physical symptoms and lower levels of mental and social functioning. Finally, Bonomi and colleagues reported that "physically and/or sexually abused women were also nearly three times as likely to report fair or poor health" (p. 464).

Understanding the micro and macro-level consequences of IPV helps society to better understand the pervasive influence that IPV has on all aspects of civilization as well as become more informed on how to prevent the problem, and ultimately the consequences of the problem. Furthermore, continued awareness and research of IPV can work to end the pervasive nature of violence against women within society.

Current Study

Given these varied consequences of staying in an abusive relationship, research exploring the circumstances that surround a woman choosing to leave a violent relationship is of significant interest. Understanding the factors that influence a woman's decision to leave has implications for stemming the cycle of violence. These factors may be primarily internal, meaning they stem from the survivor's internal conscious and include a survivor's mental health, which includes depressive symptoms, empowerment, and assertiveness, commitment to the relationship, as well as spirituality. Women may also choose to leave a violent relationship for reasons external to themselves. External factors include social structures and a survivor's environment, including community resources and services. Furthermore, these external factors consist of her partner's behaviors and actions, socioeconomic factors, including employment, children, and her history of abuse. In addition to better understanding the internal and external factors associated with leaving, a woman's chronological process of leaving the relationship is important to note. The chronological process is cyclical in nature and two theories will help to shape our understanding of the leaving process: Transtheoretical Model of Change and Social Exchange Theory.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of women in an abusive relationship, particularly their decisions to leave the abusive relationship. Specifically, this study explored both internal and external factors that influence womens' decisions to leave an abusive relationship. The internal and external variables included within the study are influences that emerged from the literature as prominent variables. A thorough review of the literature within the second chapter will cover the phenomenon of interest, leaving the relationship, in more depth. The third chapter of this study explains the utilization of several theoretical frameworks to understand how survivors of IPV make changes and decisions about

the actions that they will take to terminate their relationship with the abusive partner as well as guide the development of the qualitative questions asked of survivors. The following theoretical frameworks are applied: Feminist Theory, Transtheoretical Model of Change, and Social Exchange Theory. In the fourth chapter, the qualitative methodological process is outlined and explained in detail as well as sample characteristics and procedures used for analysis of the data in the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following chapter provides a comprehensive synopsis pertaining to factors, both internally and externally, involved in deciding whether to leave an abusive relationship. Much of the IPV literature concerning a survivor leaving an abusive relationship can be divided into two categories: internal and external factors (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). This literature review is comprised of two large sections – internal and external factors – with several subsections within each of those larger categories. The variables included within the internal and external categories are factors that emerged from the literature as prominent variables. The internal variables include: mental health, level of commitment to the relationship, and spirituality. The external variables include: children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse, support, socio-economic influences, and offender characteristics. Additionally, a further breakdown of categories was conducted for several of the subsections. For example, the external variable of support is broken into informal and formal support networks. It is essential to identify these two categories but to also recognize the possible correlations and interactions between internal and external factors as well.

The following search terms were utilized to find appropriate literature pertaining to leaving an abusive relationship: "leaving," "intimate partner violence," "abuse," "escape," "change," "domestic violence," "support," "children," "survivor," "spirituality," "empowerment," "attachment," "psychological abuse," "physical abuse," "social support," "finances," and "resources." These terms were searched within the following academic databases: Academic Search Complete, CINAHL Complete, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Family Studies Abstracts, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycInfo, and Social Work

Abstracts. I collected applicable information in the form of both empirical and conceptual journal articles, reports, books, and dissertations. There are several seminal pieces of work that researchers have contributed to the IPV field regarding the issue of the stay-leave decision making process for a survivor. The seminal pieces of work are included in this literature review, as well as current studies concerning the issue of leaving an abusive relationship. The following review of the literature will discuss the internal and external factors that contribute to a woman leaving an abusive relationship as identified within IPV research. This review of the literature is not a formal systematic review. Please see Appendix A for a full table of the articles found regarding leaving an abusive relationship.

Scholars often use a survivor's theory approach to better understand the factors that contribute to a woman leaving an abusive relationship (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). A learned helplessness approach suggests passivity, "entrapment," and weakness on the part of the survivor (Strube, 1988, p. 241), whereas, conversely, the survivor's theory suggests that abused women take on a more purposeful role to seek help, while considering the safety of themselves and their children. Gondolf and Fisher (1988) outline the contrasting differences between the learned helplessness and survivor theory approaches. Rather than presenting survivors as passive victims paralyzed from the abuse, the survivor's theory considers women in abusive relationships to be resourceful, methodical, and deliberate. Sev'er (2002) described the women interviewed as "active agents" who initiate survival strategies for themselves and their children (p. 134). A survivor's theory approach will be used throughout this review of professional literature in order to better understand survivors leaving an abusive relationship from a position of empowerment. This review will explore both external and internal factors that enable a survivor to leave an abusive relationship.

Survivors are incredibly perceptive to understanding factors, both internally and externally, that may hinder or empower their capacity to leave abusive relationships. Survivors informally conduct a mental cost/benefit analysis regarding staying or leaving abusive relationships. In other words, they identify various factors in their relationship and environment and consider the relevant costs of leaving versus the benefits of staying (Pfouts, 1978; Strube, 1988). Ultimately, survivors choose a strategy that they can execute that is most beneficial for themselves and their children based on an assessment of their safety needs and practical capabilities (Strube, 1988). In the development of a strategies guide developed by Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, and Cook (2003), the researchers found that terminating the abusive relationship was the primary strategy (86.9%) survivors utilized to deal with IPV. Enander and Holmber (2008) found that the leaving process for survivors occurs in three overlapping stages: the physical process of breaking up, which covers action, the emotional process of becoming free, and finally the cognitive process of coming to an understanding regarding leaving an abusive relationship. The difficult process of leaving and ending an abusive relationship has significant implications for social work practice with survivors and their children in order to maintain their safety. Within the literature, it is very difficult for researchers to distinguish between staying in an abusive relationship, seeking help for an abusive relationship, and leaving an abusive relationship. The focus of this literature review is on the help-seeking and leaving processes, however, several factors are intertwinded in both the leaving and staying decision process. Children, for example, are both a reason why survivors stay in abusive relationship but are also a reason why they escape violent relationships (Meyer, 2011; Moe, 2009; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010).

Internal factors

For the purpose of this study, internal factors are understood to include mental health, which includes depressive symptoms, empowerment, and assertiveness, commitment to the relationship, which includes attachment, as well as a survivor's spirituality. These factors were selected due to their prominence and establishment within the IPV literature regarding survivors leaving abusive relationships as well as their likely affect on the stay-leave decision process.

Mental health. Many studies focus on the prevalence of mental health problems among survivors of IPV (Anderson 2002, 2007; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Kernic, Holt, Stoner, Wolf, & Rivara, 2003; Shurman, & Rodriguez, 2006; Strube, 1988; Tolman & Rosen, 2001; White & Satyen, 2015). The mental health of an individual encompasses their emotional, psychological, and social well being, both positive and negative. Based on a review of the literature, the internal mental health attributes analyzed in this review include: depression, empowerment, and assertiveness.

Depressive symptoms. As a significant mental health problem, depression can lead to suicidal ideation or suicide (WHO, 2012). Depression exists on a continuum from mild to severe (WHO, 2012). When an individual experiences depressive symptoms, he or she may suffer from extreme sadness, reduced energy, intense anxiety, loss of sleep, low self-esteem, or loss of interest in activities such as work and pleasure (WHO, 2012). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM–5*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) defines depression as "the presence of sad, empty, or irritable mood, accompanied by somatic and cognitive changes that significantly affect the individuals' capacity to function" (p. 155). Research has found that a survivor's level of depression influences her ability and willingness to

leave an abusive relationship (Kernic, Holt, Stoner, Wolf, & Rivara, 2003; White & Satyen, 2015).

In a systematic review performed by White and Satyen (2015), the authors capture several inconsistent studies pertaining to IPV and depression and a survivor's help-seeking behavior. Of the eleven studies evaluated, six found significant differences between IPV and depression across different cultures, whereas the other five studies show no difference between IPV and depression between various cultures. One important consistency to note was a positive relationship between IPV experienced and depressive symptoms (White & Satyen, 2015). White and Satyen (2015) propose that depressive symptoms among culturally diverse survivors may exacerbate their help-seeking, and ultimately limit their ability and willingness to leave abusive relationships. Additionally, Kernic, Holt, Stoner, Wolf, and Rivara (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of 448 survivors of IPV in which they analyzed a survivor's level of depressive symptoms after the end of abusive episodes; they looked at psychological and physical/sexual abuse, as well as a combination of these abusive acts. As the violence increases, the significance of depressive symptoms becomes greater (Kernic et al., 2003); this suggests that the greater the violence experienced, the greater the depression, and the less likely a survivor is able to leave the relationship.

Other scholars have different interpretations of IPV and depression. For example, Gondolf and Fisher (1988) describe a survivor's depressive symptoms as possible separation anxiety. In this instance, the survivor's fear of the unknown after leaving an abuser can be equally as frightening as returning to the abusive relationship. Survivors may fear finding a job that will support them and their children and provide sufficient income for childcare, transportation, housing, food, and other essentials. These compounding fears may lead survivors

to return to abusers, who may seem to be the "lesser of two evils" (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988, p. 22).

    Empowerment. A woman's level of empowerment plays a significant role in enabling her to leave an abusive relationship. The more emotionally independent and well-adjusted a woman is, the more likely she feels empowered to leave the relationship (Baly, 2010; Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1997; Kesner & McKenry, 1995; Rosen and Stith, 1999). By contrast, previous research shows that women with low self-esteem and decreased levels of independence face a higher risk of continuing in the abusive relationship (Dutton & White, 2012; Follingstad, Brennan, Hause, Polek, & Rutledge, 1991; Strube & Barbour, 1984). Rosen and Stith (1999) conducted a qualitative study in which they discovered a theme of self-reclaiming actions. Within their findings, the eleven interviewed women evaluated their situation and what options they should or should not pursue in leaving an abusive relationship. These self-reclaiming actions include "self-empowering moves where the woman took more control of her life," as well as, establishing boundaries and becoming more self-aware (Rosen & Stith, 1999, p. 157). In a qualitative study done by Baly (2010), he found that survivors of IPV who value the "importance of self-reliance and taking responsibility for one's own actions and needs" impacted their ability to leave an abusive relationship (p. 2306). This level of empowerment also helped them to be able to cope with thei situation (Baly, 2010).

    Assertiveness. Assertiveness, defined as "confident in behavior or style," (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, 2015) pertains to a survivor's ability to stand up for herself and her beliefs. Gondolf and Fisher (1988) state that, anthropologically speaking, women have an instinctual ability to preserve life as biologically determined by their ability to bear children. This innate approach that women have to endure, survive and procreate, can also be viewed as a

form of assertiveness or inner strength that survivors have in withstanding life's challenges. A survivor's theory approach presents survivors as proactive individuals who are assertive, meticulous, and thoughtful, particularly with regard to violent relationships (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Sev'er, 2002). A woman who believes that men and women should have equal rights, both in society and within a relationship, is more likely to take action to defend her views and leave an abusive relationship (Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015). In a mixed methods study by Frías and Carolina Agoff (2015), they conducted focus groups with 64 women who have experienced or are currently experiencing IPV. In their study, the researchers found that women who believed in equal rights between men and women were more likely to seek help for an abusive relationship. Furthermore, Estrellado and Loh (2013) interviewed 40 Filipino survivors of IPV and found that women who "displayed a more independent personality" were more likely to leave the abusive relationship (p. 582).

Assertiveness on the part of a survivor points to several implications for leaving an abusive relationship. In a quantitative study done by Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, and Gottman (1997), they they conducted a longitudinal study over a two year period with 60 couples who engaged in severe IPV. The researchers suggest that survivors who were more firm and "intolerant of her husband's contemptuous and belligerent, verbal and physical behavior," were more likely to leave (Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1997, p. 350). Under such risky and tumultuous circumstances, survivors of abuse who confront their abusive partners not only demonstrated incredible strength and empowerment, but also showed tremendous courage and determination. Using the same sample of 60 couples, similarly, Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, and Shortt (1996) found that women who were assertive and likely to defend themselves during an argument were also more likely to leave an abusive relationship. This position is not to

suggest that survivors who stay in abusive relationships are not strong; assertion involves exercising authority, whereas strength is the ability to endure and survive. Other research suggests that, prior to the abusive behavior becoming severe in nature, women who stipulated, or asserted, that the abusive partner seek help for his controlling behavior saw a reduction or cessation of abuse (Follingstad, Hause, Rutledge, & Polek, 1992).

Level of commitment to relationship. A woman's level of commitment to the relationship plays a critical role in her decision to leave an abusive relationship. Commitment entails many different attributes, such as personal satisfaction, religion, tradition, attachment, and love (Strube & Barbour, 1983). Many studies found that, regardless of the abuse, higher levels of emotional attachment or commitment to the relationship impact a woman's decision to stay in the relationship (Ferrario & Johnson, 1983; Follingstad, Neckerman, & Vormbrock, 1988; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006; Strube & Barbour, 1984; Truman-Schram, Cann, Calhoun, & Vanwallendael, 2000). Researchers Strube and Barbour (1984) expanded on their previous study (Strube & Barbour, 1983) regarding commitment and economic dependence with a larger sample size and discovered that commitment and economic dependence had a significant influence on a woman's decision-making process. The less committed the survivor was to the relationship, the more likely she was to leave (Strube & Barbour, 1984). Other related attributes, such as religion and/or tradition, also correlated with a woman's level of commitment to the abusive relationship (Follingstad, et al., 1988); Follingstad et al. (1988) reported that a woman's religious and traditional beliefs remain unique and distinctive part of her personal identity and are tied with her level of commitment to the relationship, and, therefore, leaving the abusive relationship would contradict her beliefs, and, ultimately, her identity. The study supports that a survivor would "appeal to her high loyalties"

or personal commitments in the stay-leave decision process (Follingstad et al., 1988, p. 379).

Scholars Rusbult and Martz (1995) conducted an analysis on personal investment in the

relationship and developed a robust model that supported several factors related to commitment.

First, survivors who felt more satisfied in the relationship, as defined by more positive feelings

toward the abuser, experienced fewer severe incidents of abuse, and were involved with less

violent men, conveyed a stronger commitment. Additionally, survivors who had few alternatives

for leaving, such as limited financial means, less education, and no transportation, exhibited a

greater commitment to the relationship. Finally, women who were married to their partners, had

children with their partners, and were in a longer relationship, were more committed to staying in

the relationship (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

A woman's emotional state regarding the relationship either facilitated or impeded the

stay-leave decision process. Several articles describe that women experienced some form of

shift, or turning point, in an abusive relationship, which ultimately impacts her level of

commitment to the relationship (Chang, et al., 2010; Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Haj-Yahia &

Eldar-Avidan, 2001; Khaw, & Hardesty, 2007; Murray, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015; Scheffer &

Renck, 2008; Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). Enander (2011) suggests that the physical and

emotional shift away from the abuser and the relationship is indicative of a turning point and

triggers the moment in which the survivor can no longer tolerate the abuse. In a study conducted

by Murray, Crowe, and Flasch (2015), turning points in abusive relationships included: "facing

the threat of severe violence," "changing their perspective about the relationship, abuse, and/or

their partner," "learning about the dynamics of abuse," "experiencing an intervention from

external sources or consequences," "realizing the impact of violence on children," and "the

relationship being terminated by the abuser or some other cause" (p. 233-235). Similarly,

Enander and Holmberg (2008) suggest that the turning point occurs when the survivor's life is in danger or when someone else's well-being is impacted by the abuse. These turning points impact a survivor's commitment to the relationship and play a powerful role in determining and influencing a survivor's decision to leave the abusive relationship.

The turning points in an abusive relationship could also be associated with Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests that discrepancies in individuals' beliefs cause them to become more determined to alleviate the inconsistencies in their life. Mills and Malley-Morrison (1998) describe the process further:

> Individuals with a high level of commitment can most easily reduce dissonance by making external attributions (blaming themselves or the situation) for their partners' abusive behaviors. By contrast, moderately committed individuals would experience less dissonance, be less motivated to reduce dissonance, and have less to lose by blaming the partner for his or her abusive behaviors (p. 694).

Cognitive dissonance theory is utilized to help understand individuals who are experiencing contradictions with their thoughts and emotions. The theory states that individuals who experience internal conflicts, or dissonance, try to establish equilibrium, or relief of the discord, by whatever means possible (Mills & Malley-Morrison, 1998). Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory suggests that a survivor's level of commitment to the relationship may fluctuate depending on the level of cognitive dissonance she experiences. Additionally, in a qualitative study conducted by Enander (2011), the researcher found that the leaving process is facilitated when the cognitive dissonance is so great that it overcomes the positive emotions a survivor has for the abuser.

Attachment. Attachment, or emotional dependence, makes the leaving process more difficult for a survivor. Dutton and Painter (1981, 1993) describe Traumatic Bonding Theory, which suggests that a period of time exists in which she experiences fear and sadness after leaving an abusive relationship. During this transition period, the survivor's attachment to her partner remains ever present. The survivor is at the most risk for returning to the abusive relationship despite the frequency or severity of violence in order to establish some form of emotional stability or equilibrium (Dutton & Painter, 1981). A survivor's emotional dependence correlates with her level of commitment as well as her desire to have a companion and feel needed (Strube & Barbour, 1983). Emotional attachment plays a central role in the decision-making process for women (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). In a qualitative study done by Griffing, Ragin, Sage, Madry, Bingham, and Primm (2002), researchers found that feelings of emotional attachment of the survivors they interviewed emphatically influenced the leaving process, and the women were likely to underestimate the strength of these feelings that they have for their partner. Additionally, Griffing and colleagues (2002) discovered that emotional attachment survivors have with their partners played a larger role in influencing their stay-leave decision than external factors such as economics.

Spirituality. In some cases, a survivor's spirituality played a prominent role in her stay-leave decision process; oftentimes, in the event of trauma and pain, individuals turn to their religious or spiritual belief systems for guidance and understanding (Fortune, Abugideiri, & Dratch, 2010). Potter (2007) concluded that women, particularly black women, utilized their own spiritual or religious guidance as a help-seeking effort in order to leave their abusive relationship as opposed to utilizing community social services.

Drum et al. (2013) described the use of spirituality as a form of "spiritual coping" in which the survivor utilizes her spiritual beliefs as a form of coping mechanism to assist her through this stressful period in her life (p. 391). For Christian women, belief in God often served as a means from which to draw strength. Furthermore, Christian women often attributed positive outcomes to the work of God and their beliefs. In research performed by Drumm et al. (2013) titled "'God Just Brought Me Through It': Spiritual Coping Strategies for Resilience Among Intimate Partner Violence Survivors," the authors interviewed Christian women and discovered the importance of religion in the context of resiliency and coping. Similarly, Senter and Caldwell (2002) stated that many women turned to God for support during their time of need when leaving the abusive relationship. The participants described "an internal knowing or certainty that the help of God would somehow get them through anything" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002, p. 550).

External factors

Social and institutional factors also contribute to a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship. These factors, external to a woman's psychological being, and, for the most part, outside of her control, include her social structures and her environment, including community resources and services. Furthermore, these factors consist of her partner's behaviors and actions, socioeconomic factors, including employment, children, and her history of abuse. Many of these critical factors play a substantial role in hindering or enabling women attempting to leave an abusive relationship. The external factors were chosen due to their well-established status within the IPV literature regarding survivors leaving abusive relationships as well as their likely impact on the stay-leave decision process.

Children. Many scholars note the influence children have on their mother's decision to both stay in and leave an abusive relationship (Estrellado & Loh, 2013; Meyer, 2010, 2011; Moe,

2009; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). Meyer (2010) found children to be the largest predictor of help-seeking in relationship to survivors and IPV. In the study done by Meyer (2010), which consisted of a sample of 2,276 women who reported having experienced IPV at some point in time, the researcher found that children who had witnessed the abuse had the largest effect on a survivor's likelihood of disclosing the abuse to a formal source of support, such as the police. In one study, 55% of survivors revealed that their decision to leave the abusive relationship was a result of wanting to protect their children from the abusive environment (Meyer, 2011). Meyer found that 88% of women with children who witnessed violence were likely to seek help, and that percentage reduced to 68% when children were not present or did not witness violence (Meyer, 2010). Additionally, in a nationally representative sample of 4,034 married individuals who conducted the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), Anderson (2007) established that survivors with young children, particularly ages 0 to 9 years old, were more likely to leave a violent relationship; an important finding suggesting that abused women wish to shield young children from violence.

Moe (2009) concluded that women leave the abusive relationship "when either their children asked them to or it became obvious to them that the emotional, physical, and financial repercussions of staying outweighed those of leaving" (p. 252). The trepidation of children witnessing the violence or fear of their children being abused often triggers a woman to leave (Rhodes et al., 2010). Scholars also found that a child's increased exposure to IPV also increased the likelihood of a woman leaving the abusive relationship. In a quantitative study of 448 participants, Bonomi, Holt, Martin, and Thompson (2006) found that women in abusive relationships were more likely to call the police if children lived in the home. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if survivors with children leave an abusive relationship out of

concern about the long-term effects that IPV will have on their children or if survivors fear the abuser will direct abuse toward the children.

In a qualitative study of survivors of IPV, approximately 69% cited their children as a reason for not leaving the relationship (Meyer, 2011). Parental reasons, such as economic stability, the role of a father figure, fear of losing the children, and fear of uprooting them from their home, are other reasons survivors maintain for staying in the abusive relationship (Moe, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). Survivors believed, either on their own accord or by influence of their abusive partners, that by staying in the relationship, the survivors were acting in the children's best interests (Moe, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010). Additionally, in a qualitative study of focus groups with survivors, the survivor's feelings toward Child Protective Services (CPS) and the legal system influenced her decision not to leave the abusive relationship (Rhodes et al., 2010). The survivor experienced conflicting emotions about protecting the children from abuse versus protecting them from involvement with the criminal justice system and CPS (Rhodes et al., 2010). The negative stigma and threat of having the children taken away by CPS significantly impacts a woman's decision to seek help. Fear, guilt, shame, and embarrassment are manifested in a survivor's experience when deciding whether or not to leave the relationship on account of the children (Moe, 2009; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). Factors involving children cause survivors to continuously hesitate or even delay their decision-making process (Rhodes et al., 2010). There is conflicting research pertaining to women who have children and are in an abusive relationship and leaving or staying in an abusive relationship.

Patterns of Abuse. Both the frequency and severity of violence that a woman experiences influences the stay-leave decision. Gelles (1976) proposed a "common sense" hypothesis, which suggests that battered women will be more likely to leave as the violence

increases in severity and frequency. Erikson and Drenovsky (1990) identified the importance of distinguishing between frequency and severity of violence and the serious impact that each pattern has on a survivor's decision making process.

Severity. One of the difficulties in understanding violence severity relates to the varying definitions of "severe" and the range of measurement tools, which are both factors that contribute to inconsistent findings. Many studies measure severity of violence based on physical actions that the abusive partner takes, such as hitting, pushing, punching, etc. Stroshine and Robinson (2003) measure severity in terms of a woman's injuries sustained, such as cuts, bruises, sprains, and broken bones to better understand the abusive behavior. Whether or not a survivor enters the hospital, voluntarily or involuntarily, was also taken into account. In one study, extreme severity of violence that resulted in hospitalization of the survivor was the lone predictor of women leaving an abusive relationship (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003); other frequency and severity predictors were not significant in predicting a woman's readiness to leave an abusive relationship.

Findings pertaining to severity of violence are contradictory. Gelles (1976) found that the less severe the violence, physical, sexual, and psychological, the more likely a survivor was to remain in the abusive relationship, which suggests increased severity of violence is positively correlated with a woman leaving an abusive relationship. In contrast, many studies found that a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship did not correlate with violence severity (Martin, et al., 2000; Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). Other studies confirm that when the abuse escalates in severity to a life threatening situation, a woman was more inclined to leave the relationship (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Pape & Arias, 2000). In an exploratory quantitative study conducted by Hilbert, Kolia, and VanLeeuwen (1997) found that the chances of a woman

returning to her abusive partner increased with more severe physical violence. Hilbert, Kolia, and VanLeeuwen (1997) found that emotional and verbal abuse were better predictors of leaving an abusive relationship than the severity of physical abuse. The dynamics between the severity of violence and the correlation it has with the decision-making process for leaving an abusive relationship requires more extensive research.

Frequency. Erikson and Drenovsky (1990) found in their study of 113 participants, that violence frequency, rather than severity, is a better indicator of leaving an abusive relationship. Walker (1979) presents the Cycle of Violence Theory in which he proposes a cycle of abuse that contains three stages. He describes the stages as, "the tension-building phase; the explosion or acute battering incident; and the calm, loving respite" (p. 55). This consistent cycle is repeated over time and survivors often identify the phases they are in and random or constant violence is not the norm for an abusive relationship. In a quantitative study of 75 survivors, Dutton and Painter (1993) found that the calm, loving respite phase of a violent relationship plays a significant role in a woman not leaving an abusive relationship. The loving phase, also called "honeymoon phase," provides the survivor with positive and encouraging moments for the relationship. The survivor is, therefore, less likely to leave. However, abuse that is more constant and frequent without positive elements is more likely to result in a woman leaving the relationship (Dutton & Painter, 1993). In a seminal piece, Gelles (1976) found in his quantitative analysis that 83% of the survivors sampled who were physically struck once a week and 100% of the survivors stuck once a month either divorced or separated from the partner, contacted the police, or sought assistance at a social service agency.

Psychological abuse. The level of psychological abuse, also called emotional or verbal abuse, which a survivor experiences contributes significantly to her stay-leave decision process.

Many researchers have found that psychological abuse may be a more accurate predictor of leaving an abusive relationship than physical violence (Arias & Pape, 1999; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Hilbert, Kolia, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Shortt, 1996; Lacey, 2010). Psychological abuse is more difficult to identify with IPV relationships. There are no visible injuries or scars from psychological abuse, nonetheless, it can be just as damaging to a survivor as physical abuse (Jackson, 2007). Psychological abuse has also been linked to deterioration of a survivor's physical health prior to experiences of physical abuse (Follingstad et al., 1991). Arias and Pape (1999) argue that physical violence has a clear pattern of beginning and ending; however, psychological abuse is more persistent and more difficult for a survivor to overcome after leaving an abusive relationship. Queen, Brackley, and Williams (2009) describe the continuous nature of emotional abuse that survivors experience. They state:

> The immediate trauma of their experience may have ended, but today was part of yesterday and yesterday was part of tomorrow. The women attributed the perpetual nature of their abuse experience to the pervasiveness and persistence of flashbacks, physical illnesses, inadequate coping mechanisms, and relationship difficulties… (p. 242).

Tolman (1989) developed a psychological measurement scale in order to measure a survivor's experiences with psychological abuse. The scale is made up of two subscales, which include dominance-isolation as well as emotional-verbal. The dominance-isolation subscale measures factors such as isolation, demands of submissive behavior, and adherence to traditional sex roles. The emotional-verbal scale evaluates verbal attacks on a survivor, demeaning behavior toward women, and withholding of affection by the abuser (Tolman, 1989). Additionally, the

National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) integrates questions pertaining to "psychological aggression," which was further defined as "expressive aggression" or name-calling, humiliation, or insulting as well as "coercive control" or monitoring, controlling, or threatening (Black et al., 2011). In order to comprehensively understand the broad range of experiences of survivors, a thorough understanding of the impact of psychological versus physical abuse is needed.

Many scholars advocate that psychological abuse that consisted of verbal and/or emotional abuse often resulted in a survivor leaving an abuse relationship (Arias & Pape, 1999; Follingstad, et al., 1992; Gortner et al., 1997; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Hilbert, Kolia, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; Jacobson et al., 1996; Lacey, 2010). While these studies do not diminish the importance of understanding the serious concerns of physical abuse, the authors highlight a critical component, which includes the impacts psychological abuse has on a survivor. In a study of 60 couples who experienced male on female IPV, Jacobson et al. (1996) found that survivors who were psychologically abused and isolated from friends and family members were more likely to leave the relationship than those who were not. Their findings also support the previously stated argument that physical violence is a less compelling predictor of a woman leaving an abusive relationship than psychological abuse. In a longitudinal, 2-year study conducted by Jacobson et al. (1996), the researchers concluded that the impacts of psychological abuse can have a greater negative impact on a survivor than physical abuse. Utilizing NVAWS quantitative survey data, Lacey (2010) found that among Black and Hispanic survivors surveyed, Hispanic women were significantly more likely to leave the relationship if the abuser shouted at or swore at the survivor and if they made her feel inadequate than Black survivors.

Arias and Pape (1999) found that, after controlling for physical abuse experienced, psychological abuse of survivors was a predictor of both PTSD symptomology (at the p < .05 level) as well as leaving the relationship (at the p < .001 level). Researchers found that women who experience significant amounts of psychological abuse may have more difficulty terminating a relationship because they may not be emotionally capable due to their low self-esteem and damaged self-confidence as a result of the psychological abuse (Arias & Pape, 1999). Arias and Pape (1999) also found that women who experienced severe forms of psychological abuse were more likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, which may impact a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship.

Survivor's perceived risk/safety. In addition to the level of severity and frequency in the stay-leave decision, a woman's own perceived level of safety and assessment of danger merits consideration. Martin et al. (2000) found that a survivor's assessment of her "personal risk are not significantly associated with their status on objective risk factors for returning to an abusive relationship…which indicates that those women who would be expected to be the most vulnerable to returning to the relationship do not perceive themselves to be at greater risk of doing so" (p.117). This veil of "optimistic bias," or not believing themselves to be in as much danger as they really are, demonstrates the need to educate women more regularly on risk-assessment within a violent relationship (Martin et al., 2000, p. 117). Educating survivors about the dynamics of intimate partner violence and safety may help survivors to better understand the reality of their situation and better plan for their own safety and the safety of their children when leaving an abusive relationship.

Campbell's (1986) research conflicts with Martin et al. (2000). Martin et al. (2000) found that abused women are the most capable in precisely evaluating their level of risk and danger in

an abusive relationship. In contrast, Campbell (1986) established that survivors need further education regarding the risk of homicide to more fully assess their level of danger and to make a more informed decision regarding their safety and the safety of their children. Several studies support the concept that survivors can best assess their level of danger in an abusive relationship (Cattaneo, Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Follingstad et al., 1992; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997; Pape & Arias, 2000; Ulrich, 1991). Women who experience substantial levels of violence and trauma are more likely to recognize the gravity of the situation and leave the abusive relationship (Cattaneo, Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Follingstad et al., 1992). Cattaneo, Bell, Goodman, and Dutton (2007) found that approximately two out of three survivors were able to assess their level of safety accurately. Additionally, in a study conducted by Amanor-Boadu et al. (2012) where they found that "immigrant women's perception of the risk for future physical harm was not predictive of their leaving, whereas nonimmigrant women were more likely to leave their relationship when their perception of this risk was higher" (p. 625). These studies highlight the importance of better understanding IPV and a survivor's level of safety from the perspective of the survivor.

History of abuse. A woman's history of abuse, including abuse from other intimate partners and family members, contributes to a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship. Many studies focused on a woman's experiences with abuse, either witnessing it or experiencing it as a child, and her decision to stay in or leave the abusive relationship.

Family of origin. In a quantitative study of 117 women, Schutte, Malouff, and Doyle (1988) found that women with abusive histories may be "primed to escape" their abusive relationship (p. 609). Additionally, women with experiences in their past as children may already

know how to cope with the violence (Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988). After conducting a thorough systematic review of the leaving process, Anderson and Saunders (2003) found that a history of violence "may sometimes bolster a woman's determination to escape the abuse" (p. 170). Rather than allowing the abuse to become normative behavior, women choose to escape their generational cycle of violence by taking control and leaving the relationship.

In a seminal, empirical study, Gelles (1976) predicted that one of two theories occurred regarding victimization as a child and victimization as an adult and ultimately leaving the relationship. First, Gelles (1976) suggested that women who experience abuse as both children and adults are more prone to identify the violence as adverse and seek help either in the form of a divorce or intervention. The second theory Gelles (1976) suggests is that experiences with violence as a child provides women with examples or models of what to do in the event of violent situations. His theories are supported by a quantitative study in which he found the best predictors (at the $p < .05$ level) of a survivor seeking an intervention, separating or getting a divorce, or pursing assistance through a social service agency is the level of violence they experienced within their faimly of origin.

Previous attempts at leaving. Research supports that it is extremely difficult for women to permanently leave an abusive relationship on the first attempt (Campbell, Miller, Cardwell, & Belknap, 1994; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991). In a study done by Herbert, Silver, and Ellard (1991), approximately half of the women reported returning to their abuser on at least one occasion. Griffing et al. (2002) found that two-thirds of the women returned to the abuser; many women returned several times. Research indicates a pattern of women leaving an abusive relationship, seeking help through community resources and friends, but then later returning to the abuser (Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988). Additionally, Griffing et al. (2002) found that

women who left an abusive relationship and were aware of the cycle of returning to the abuser remained in denial about the pattern occurring within their own lives. While the finding of survivors returning to abusive relationships appears disheartening, Schutte, Malouff, and Doyle (1988) offer hope. They state that:

> The correlation between number of separations and intent not to return seems to suggest that battering victims may be slow to leave the batterer permanently but tend to increase their revolve in that direction over time. Hence, women who return to a batterer after prior separations may not be hopelessly locked into being a victim. They may be moving slowly toward leaving permanently (p. 609).

Support. Many studies document the impact of informal and formal support on women in abusive relationships (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Estrellado & Loh, 2013; Fraser, McNutt, & Clark, 2002; Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015; Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). The ability to identify outside support within the lives of survivors of IPV becomes more difficult due to abusers' control tactic of isolation. Isolation is a common form of coercive control that an abusive partner exerts over a survivor (Davies & Lyon, 2014; Johnson, 2008). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) affirmed that approximately 44% of survivors experienced some form of this coercive control tactic, which usually involved preventing the survivor from seeing or talking to family and friends (Black et al., 2011). Bosch and Bergen (2006) state, "supportive persons serve as a connection in helping women access broader formal and informal networks, and access resources which in turn decreases isolation" (p. 319). Fraser, McNutt, and Clark (2002) found that 90% of African American women who experienced IPV felt comfortable seeking assistance through formal or informal supports. For the purposes of this review of the

literature, informal support includes a survivor's family, friends, co-workers, or individuals who are part of the survivor's personal, social network; formal support includes agencies, organizations, and community services.

    Informal, social support. Informal social support positively influences a woman's self-esteem and leads to her ability to leave abusive relationships (Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Moss et al., 1997; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). In a longitudinal, quantitative, multivariate analysis study of 406 African American women seeking help for IPV, Goodman et al. (2005) found that social supports serve as a protective factor for some women in abusive relationships, but not for women who experience the most severe forms of violence. By becoming more knowledgeable about informal support systems, Goodman et al. (2005) argued that survivors could become more empowered and capable of identifying these protective factors. Researchers concluded that "women with the least amount of social support had a 65% predicted probability of reabuse during the next year, compared to a 20% predicted probability for women reporting the highest level of social support" (Goodman et al., 2005, p. 331). Moreover, 69% of survivors used connections with social supports as a resourceful strategy to leave the abusive relationship; 59% of survivors stayed with a family member or friend; and 41.5% of survivors sent their children to stay with family or friends during the abusive relationship (Goodman et al., 2003). Supportive individuals included friends and neighbors (43%), mothers (34%) and sisters and sister-in-laws (approximately 4%) (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). In a quantitative, correlational study conducted by Bosch and Bergen (2006), the researchers found that individuals who were supportive of survivors of abuse helped connect them to other formal and informal networks and resources reducing their level of isolation and ultimately assist them in leaving the relationship. In contrast,

the researchers found that individuals who were not supportive can actually hinder a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship (Bosch & Bergen, 2006).

Turning to social supports when trying to leave an abusive relationship is a multidimensional issue. Hamby (2014) reported that simply asking a survivor whether or not she has family or friends who would support her is not sufficient in order to truly understand the complex relationships between survivors and possible support networks. Rather, the manner in which family and friends react to a survivor turning to them for help may play a role in assisting survivor to leave the relationship. For example, Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, and Sullivan, (2003) found a correlation between the number of times a woman leaves an abusive relationship and the type of social support she received. If a survivors had left an abusive relationship and returned to the partner several time, she was less likely to receive support from family or friends. In contrast, survivors who were married to their partners, at the time of abuse, were more likely to receive support from family and friends (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003). The supporters' reactions to a woman's plea for assistance are essential components to a survivor's outcome (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). Family and friends who support a survivor in a nonjudgmental way versus a critical; individuals who validate the survivor versus blaming her; and supportive persons who are encouraging versus opposing the survivor are all positive reactions that survivors need in order to enable them to leave (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). Bosch and Bergen (2006) specified, "Women with abusive partners need supportive friends and others who validate the abuse, help them identify the abuse, tell them about resources, give advice, and encourage them to access resources" (p. 319). Additionally, in a qualitative study with 56 survivors, Bosch and Bergen (2006) found that supportive persons statistically significantly helped alleviate a

survivor's isloation by facilitating connections with further networks of relief within their informal and formal support systems.

The type and strength of informal support varies individually. Supports range from material or financial support to emotional support. Postmus, Severson, Berry, and Yoo (2009) found that "services and supports perceived as the most helpful were those that were material. Ironically, these were also the services and supports least received" (p. 862). Material services, including those that provide support for housing, employment, child care, and food, were least likely to be available for survivors. Survivors more often reported receiving various forms of emotional support from friends and family and individual or group counseling support, which helped facilitate leaving the abusive relationshp (Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009).

In addition, one study found that women prefer not to reveal to their social supports or family members specific details or information about the abuse (Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015). In a study that involved several focus groups, Frías and Carolina Agoff (2015) concluded that approximately 65% of women do not disclose the nature and extent of the abuse given that family may not always provide a positive form of support for the survivor. This research highlights the importance of understanding that disclosure of the abuse to family members may create more problems and tension for the survivor rather than support (Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015). Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, and Sullivan, (2003) found that family members also threatened by the abuser usually had a negative response when a survivor sought their help. Furthermore, Mitchell and Hodson (1983) conducted a quantitative study of 60 battered women and found that the more overlap between the survivor's and the abuser's social supports, the more challenging it becomes for a survivor to escape an abusive relationship.

Formal support or community resources. In addition to seeking assistance through informal social supports, many survivors pursue relief through community services and resources. Strube and Barbour (1984) found that women who sought assistance through more formal and extreme external resources (such as filing charges or applying for a protective order) were statistically significantly more prone to leave an abusive relationship (at the p < .05 level) than those who did not. Services, such as financial support, emergency shelter, available transportation, cost-efficient childcare, and employment services, are particularly imperative for survivors endeavoring to leave an abusive relationship (Davis, Hagen, & Early, 1994; Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Mills & Malley-Morrison, 1998; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Moss et al., 1997; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Strube & Barbour, 1984).

Similarly, Postmus, Severson, Berry, and Yoo (2009) found that after seeking emotional support from friends and family, survivors ranked community resources such as subsidized day care support, religious or spiritual counseling, subsidized housing, welfare services, and educational support as the top five most beneficial resources. Koepsell, Kernic, and Holt (2006) found that women who were able to access community resources, such as assistance with food stamps, transportation, child care, and housing, were more likely to leave an abusive relationship than those who were unsuccessful at receiving those resources. Additionally, in a convenience and snowball sample of 423 women, Postmus, Severson, Berry, and Yoo (2009) found that economic independence, specifically income, transportation, and childcare, have a significant impact on a woman's decision to leave, or not return to, an abusive relationship. Among the reasons why survivors did not seek outside assistance included: "the desire to handle the problem on their own," "thinking that the problem would get better by itself," lack of knowledge "about

where to go or whom to see," and "thinking that treatment would not work for them" (Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009, p. 861).

To some extent, a survivor's culture may also play a role in seeking formal support (Malley-Morrison & Hines, 2007; Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003). For example, African American and Hispanic women, have a strong sense of familism, which involves a social pattern of trusting informal networks, such family, for support (Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015); additionally, depending on their culture, some survivors have been socialized not to go outside of their informal network for assistance (hooks, 1989). Interestingly, Fraser, McNutt, and Clark (2002) found that while 90% of African American women who had experienced IPV feel comfortable seeking out support, almost 40% of the women interviewed who had not experienced IPV stated that they would not be comfortable seeking out support through informal or formal means. This discrepancy may suggest that there is continued stigma surrounding abuse in our society, shame associated with being a survivor, and negative stereotypes associated with seeking help for IPV particularly for minority survivors, which may inhibit them from leaving (Fraser, McNutt, & Clark, 2002).

Social work and counseling support. Survivors of IPV are more likely to turn to formal resources, such as counseling services and social workers, as violence increases in severity (Ansara & Hindin, 2010). In a study by Ansara and Hindin (2010), 50% of the women who experienced the most severe forms of violence discussed the abuse with a counselor or psychologist. Additionally, in a quantitative study of 448 women who had experienced abuse, Koepsell, Kernic, & Holt (2006) found that survivors who attempted and were unsuccessful at accessing domestic violence agency resources, were less likely to leave an abusive relationship.

Survivors who experienced more severe forms of IPV also utilized emergency shelters, crisis centers, and victim assistance programs most frequently. Sev'er (2002) wrote:

> The type of help and empathy these professionals provide is crucially linked to the way that the women see themselves in the future. Women's ability to develop some trust and confidence in the helping professionals may be casually linked to their eventual decision to leave the domestic relationship if the situation gets dire (p. 149).

Social workers and advocates play an important role in helping a survivor to not only cope with the abuse they have experienced but also potentially in helping them to be able to leave the relationship through formal support networks (Sev'er, 2002).

Religious support. Constructive research is growing in the area of understanding the role that religious leaders play in assisting survivors of abuse who turn to them for guidance (Potter, 2007); there are several empirical studies regarding the role of religious leaders and their approaches to assisting survivors with leaving violent relationships. In a study done by Potter (2007), entitled "Battered Black Women's Use of Religious Services and Spirituality for Assistance in Leaving Abusive Relationships," Potter found that "Christian women were either disappointed in the advice they received from clergy members who suggested they remain in the relationships and work harder, or they did not seek out cleric assistance because of their perception that the church would not help" (p. 277-278). The responses of clergy members played a significant role in a survivor's decision-making process to leave or stay in the abusive relaionship (Potter, 2007). Additionally, Fortune, Abugideiri, and Dratch, (2010) discovered that often, clergy members frequently misuse the sacred texts and give survivors prescriptive advice, such as "keep praying," "be patient, and you will be rewarded," and "get closer to God" (p. 320). In another study conducted by Copel (2008), the researcher found a significant lack of spiritual

support from others; through interviews with survivors, Copel (2008) also discovered feelings of

guilt, shame, and unworthiness, which were described as "spiritual suffering" that survivors also

had to endure (p. 125). Fortune, Abugideiri, and Dratch, (2010) suggest that clergy should be

prepared to talk about the religious traditions and values with a survivor but also reinforce that

these religious customs and tenets do not justify or condone the violence they experience. The

lack of spiritual support by religious leaders, insinuates the perpetuation of patriarchal values

within the religious culture (Copel, 2008). Power and patriarchy are two primary values that are

deeply rooted within many religious traditions. Wendt (2008) stated, "Dominant discourses

about femininity and masculinity are being maintained by religious institutions, which support

and even reinforce the acceptance of abuse within intimate relationships" (p. 152). The

profoundly established role that religious traditions have within American culture perpetuates the

patriarchal principles within society. In contrast, in a study conducted by Rotunda, Williamson,

and Penfold, (2004), the researchers found that within their sample, the survivors stated that they

were satisfied with the religious leader's response for assistance. Moreover, the religious leaders

appeared to be more knowledgeable about the issue of IPV and supported the survivors of abuse,

which oftentimes conflicts with patriarchal values of the religious traditions (Rotunda,

Williamson, & Penfold, 2004).

  Law enforcement support. Meyer (2010) established that women were more likely to turn

to formal supports, such as law enforcement or social service agencies, instead of family or

friends. Similar to contact with counseling services, women who experienced more severe

physical or psychological abuse were more likely to contact the police (Bonomi, Holt, Martin, &

Thompson, 2006). If an abuser utilized a knife or a gun, survivors were 96% more likely to

contact law enforcement; survivors were 58% more likely to call if they were severely sexually

abused; 40% more likely to call if they had been severely physically abused; 32% more likely to call if children living in the home (Bonomi, Holt, Martin, & Thompson, 2006). Within their multivariate analyses, Koepsell, Kernic, and Holt (2006) found a statistically significant relationship (at the p = .01 level) between survivors who had a previous experience of law enforcement arresting the abuser and them being less likely to leave the abusive relationship. The authors wrote, "One explanation for this finding might be a residual fear of repercussions women might have experienced after their abuser was previously arrested" (Koepsell, Kernic, & Holt, 2006, p. 144).

Despite the police's ability to arrest abusers, Belknap, Melton, Denney, Fleury-Steiner, and Sullivan (2009), found that survivors rated law enforcement services as least supportive among survivors of IPV. One explanation why survivors may believe that law enforcement is not supportive is because "most agencies and most legal organizations are quite unprepared and unable to provide meaningful assistance to women who have been beaten by their husbands" (Gelles, 1976, p. 666). In contrast, Häggblom and Möller (2007) learned that several survivors reported a positive attitude toward law enforcement because of its compassionate response to the woman's case of IPV, which ultimately contributed to them leaving the abusive relationship.

Socioeconomic influences. Socio-economic factors, such as financial dependency, employment, and poverty, all weigh significantly on a survivor's decision-making process for leaving an abusive relationship. A survivor's financial insecurity is an indicator that she will stay in an abusive relationship; it could then be understood that financial freedom may be a predictor for leaving the relationship (Johnson, 1992; Kalmuss & Straus, 1982; Kim & Gray, 2008; Strube & Barbour, 1983, 1984). Strube and Barbour (1983, 1984) focused on the impact of economic influences on relationship maintenance. The researchers utilized women who were employed

outside of the home as an objective measure of economic dependency as well as subjective

factors of economic dependence, which included a survivor's self-reported beliefs of her level of

financial dependence on the abuser. In a sample of 98 women, Strube and Barbour (1983)

hypothesized that survivors who were economically independent from their abuser were more

likely to leave an abusive relationship than survivors with no outside economic resources.

Researchers found this correlation to be true on both objective and subjective levels of economic

dependence factors. Strube and Barbour (1983) found that approximately 71% of the survivors

who were not financial dependent on their partner had left the relationship at the follow-up

interview 2 years later. Johnson (1992) found that the following variables distinguished survivors

who return to an abusive relationship and those who did not: the survivor's income, the

survivor's employment status, the severity of abuse, and the survivor's perception of herself.

Income becomes a significant factor (at the p = .03 level) depending on the severity of abuse

(Johnson 1992). Oftentimes, survivors have to make a choice between financial stability for

herself and her children and the abuse (Johnson, 1992). In contrast, Lacey (2010) conducted a

study in which Black and Hispanic survivor's responses were analyzed and found that Hispanic

women with higher income were more likely to continue in the abusive relationship rather than

leave.

 Women who leave abusive relationships are not only fearful of the economic costs of

leaving the relationship, but also the realities of facing poverty (Lyon, 2000). Kalmuss and

Straus (1982) found that a survivor's employment did not necessarily equate to economic

independence due to wage differentials between men and women. This gender-based differential

contributes to the feminization of poverty in which women experience higher rates of poverty

than men. The fear of living in poverty is exhibited in Kalmuss and Straus' (1982) study which

found "employed wives whose husbands earn considerably more than they do remain dependent on their spouses' incomes for their current standard of living" and are, therefore, less likely to leave an abusive relationship (p. 279).

Employment. Women remain at a significant disadvantage regarding employment opportunities and wages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a woman's median earnings were 83% of those of a full-time male employee (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Shepard and Pence's (1988) study found that 58% of participants were employed while experiencing abuse. The negative impacts of the abuse on the survivor's employment ranged from being late to work as a result of the abuse to termination of employment. One-third of the women in their study stated that the abuser strictly prohibited them from working, whereas 50% of them reported that the abuser discouraged them from working (Shepard & Pence, 1988). Alexander (2011) found that an abuser might utilize tactics, such as directly prohibiting or interfering with a woman's employment, as a form of abuse. Postmus, Plummer, McMahon, Murshid, and Kim (2012) found that 78% of the survivors in their study experienced some form of employment sabotage, which consisted of: doing things to prevent them from going to their jobs, demanding that they quit their jobs, threating to make them leave work, or beating them up if they said they needed to get a job. The two most prominent tactics included keeping them from going to their jobs (68%) and demanding that they quit their jobs (59%) (Postmus et al., 2012). The negative impacts from the abusive relationship significantly impacts a survivor's abilities to be financially and economically free from their abusive partner, which inhibits the leaving process (Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009).

Strube and Barbour (1983) found that in their study of 98 women, women who were not employed outside of the home and who were in a long-term relationship with abusive partners

were unlikely to leave the relationship at the p < .10 level. Riger, Staggs, and Schewe (2004) stated that:

> Although a lifetime history of intimate partner violence did not predict work stability, recent violence appears to be linked to unstable employment. Higher levels of recent violence are associated with fewer months worked. Moreover, the effect of violence is significant even in the presence of other work-related factors such as human capital (p. 813).

Lyon (2000) highlights the importance of both short-term and long-term economic resources, such as job training and placement, transitional funding for women leaving an abusive relationship, and the enforcement of child support, that are needed for survivors to leave an abusive relationship safely.

Offender characteristics. There is also research that indicates that characteristics specific to an offender may play a role in a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship. To date, very few studyies analyzes offender characteristics in a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship. Stroshine and Robinson (2003) interviewed 307 women whose abusive partners had just been arrested for a domestic violence incident. The researchers identified four statistically significant variables pertaining to offender characteristics that considerably impacted a woman's decision to leave the abusive relationship: 1) if the offender had a current criminal record, 2) if the offender possessed weapons in the home, 3) if the offender used or abused illegal drugs, and 4) if the survivor reported being stalked by the offender. Of the four characteristics, stalking was the most significant variable. When stalking occurred, survivors were three times more likely to leave an abusive relationship when compared to survivors who

were not stalked. In addition, if the offender kept a weapon in the home, survivors were twice as likely to leave.

Stroshine and Robinson (2003) also examined other variables, such as abuse history and institutional response. Abuse history questions pertained to the history of abuse within the current relationship, such as the severity and frequency of violence experienced with the arrested offender. The institutional variable consisted of questions pertaining to the survivor's interactions with the institutional response to the violence, such as an advocacy program or the criminal justice system. Through the analysis of four logistic regression models, the researchers concluded that offender characteristics played a more important role in predicting a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship than the nature of the violence (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). Additionally, Estrellado and Loh (2013) conducted qualitative interviews with 40 Filipino women who stated that substance abuse and emotional instability on the part of the abuser influenced their decision to leave the abusive relationship.

One important characteristic of abusers is their willingness to attend counseling services. Interestingly, Gondolf and Fisher (1988) asserted that the abuser's involvement in counseling services significantly impacts the survivor's stay-leave decision. These researchers found that if an abuser is in counseling, women are more likely to remain in the relationship. This finding supports previous research which suggests that survivors stay with an abusive partner, hopeful that he will change his behavior (Pfouts, 1978). Gondolf and Fisher's findings suggest that even survivors who have economic independence will still return to an abusive partner who is in counseling (1988).

Implications and Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this review of the literature, there is evident research regarding internal and external factors that impede or empower a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship. It is important to note that when a woman leaves the relationship, research has shown that leaving does not equate to a cessation of violence for many survivors. Survivors who are empowered to be able to leave an abusive relationship not only have to worry about their safety while trying to leave, but also after they have left. Several studies determined that the level of physical violence a survivor experiences increases when the survivor leaves the relationship (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, & Hall, 2006; Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000; Mahoney, 1991b). On the contrary, Hayes (2012) discovered that physical violence decreased when the survivor left the abusive relationship while psychological abuse and coercive control increased. Regardless, research supports that there is an increase in some form of violence, either directly through physical violence or indirectly through psychological abuse, once a survivor leaves the relationship. Social workers working with survivors need to better understand internal and external factors that contribute to survivors leaving abusive relationships. Furthermore, it is vital that social workers are knowledgeable about the potential for an increase in violence when a survivor leaves a violent relationship. Knowledge of internal and external factors that enable a survivor to seek help while in a violent relationship is the beginning steps to ultimately helping her live a life free of violence.

The correlation between number of separations and intent not to return seems to suggest that survivors may be slow to leave the abuser permanently but tend to increase their resolve over time; this finding has significant implications for social workers working with survivors on escaping the cycle of repeatedly returning to the abusive partner and helping the survivors and

their children to stay safe. If advocates are better equipped to understand the patterns of survivors when seeking help and ultimately leaving, they may be in a strong position to help survivors understand the behavior patterns that exist and provide enhanced services to them.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study will inform the current understanding of IPV by examining three noteworthy

frameworks to understand women's experiences, particularly in leaving a violent relationship.

Feminist theory will be considered to better understand the gendered nature of IPV and elements

of power and control in a heterosexual relationship. The transtheoretical model of change will be

applied to women making a change to leave a violent relationship because of the theory's linear

stages that outline an individual's decision to make a change in her life. Finally, social exchange

theory focuses on the power within relationships and the costs and benefits that an abusive

relationship may have for a survivor. An understanding of these three theoretical frameworks

may further enhance a social worker's knowledge of women deciding to leave abusive

relationships not only as a result of internal or external factors but also as a sequential act. The

sequences of events that a survivor experiences in leaving an abusive relationship are what guide

this study.

Feminist Theory

The broad issue of women's rights and oppression is not a new concept within society.

Feminist theory has a longstanding and vast history that has ebbed and flowed across cultures

throughout the more recent centuries. Simone De Beauvoir (1953) wrote, "This world has always

belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this have ever seemed sufficient" (p. 71). In

the 1930s, Virginia Woolf (1937) wrote an essay pertaining to women and fiction, stating, "a

woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" in which Woolf is

making a statement about how in a world dominated by patriarchy, women must have a relevant

place within society (p. 200). Later, Betty Friedan wrote a book titled *The Feminine Mystique,*

which has shaped and influenced the feminist movement to the present day. A woman's career, education, political thoughts, and intelligence are all pieces of a larger phenomenon – women's rights. Ultimately, feminists believe that "male supremacy and the subjugation of women was indeed the root and model oppression in society and that feminism had to be the basis for any truly revolutionary change" (Donovan, 2012, p. 139). Feminism purports that the perpetual cycle of social reproduction contributes to the social norms of gender within society.

The feminist movement is often described in three phases. The first wave of the movement focused on obtaining suffrage and mounting opportunities for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Women's Movement, or the second-wave, materialized during the 1960's and had a significant impact on increasing the number of women in leadership positions, women's sexuality and reproductive rights, and response to the systematic gender-based oppression and subordination of women as well as a critique of patriarchy (Mooney, 2000; Rampton, 2014). The second wave, or the Women's Movement, began to focus on IPV and the gender-based systems of persecution, specifically patriarchy and misogyny, and committed to ending IPV as one way of ending gender-based oppression (Stark, 2007). Finally, the third-wave of the feminist movement, which began around the 1990s, focused on equal rights, challenged the concept of womanhood, and advocated for expanded definitions of gender and sexuality and celebrates diversity inherent within ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Third wave feminists struggle with the terminology of "feminism," largely due to the negative connotations associated with it, but also because many believe that parity has taken shape and there is no need for an equal rights movement any longer (Rampton, 2014). Researchers further argue that a fourth wave of a feminist movement has begun, and with it, is the larger consciousness-raising of oppression to include racism, ageism, classism, abelism, and sexual orientation (Rampton, 2014).

However, many struggle with the "feminist" terminology not only because of the radical stereotype associated with the term, but also they feel the Feminist movement is limited to females only, rather than a call for gender equality, which may also include the rights of transgender, bigender, gender queer, third gender, and allies. This fourth wave of the movement aims to combat all gender inequality (Rampton, 2014).

Key constructs. Feminist theory has several key philosophies that are central to the theoretical framework. Feminists recognize that in a male-dominated culture, the ideas and scientific knowledge within a society are not necessarily gender and politically neutral. Feminist methodologies examine the way power is used to produce knowledge. Feminists hold that, "in patriarchal systems, positions of authority are largely held by men in political, economic, legal, religious, educational, and military institutions. Male dominance is maintained by power differences, with men holding great power and viewed as superior to women" (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2012, p. 116-117). Feminist theorists advocate for a gender-neutral production of scientific knowledge that takes into account feminist theory and produces knowledge that addresses gender injustice.

The concept of women being treated as second-class citizens is a fundamental tenet of feminist theory. Furthermore, an important aspect of feminist theory is the acknowledgment and examination of gender within society to ultimately determine what it is, how it works, and the societal ramifications surrounding gender issues. Dixon (2000) wrote that in order for women to be seen as free and equal citizens, "it is necessary to destroy the ideology of male supremacy which asserts the biological and social inferiority of women in order to justify massive institutionalized oppression" (p. 73).

Another key concept of radical feminism is the concept that "personal is political." Kate Millet (2000) defines politics as referring to one group that is in power controlling another one that lacks power. Millet goes on to explain how a patriarchal government consists of two basic ideologies – that men dominate women and specifically elder men dominate younger individuals. Radical feminists believe that rape is a political tactic to keep women threatened. In their article, "Rape: An Act of Terror," authors Mehrhof and Kearon (1973) wrote, "Terror is an integral part of the oppression of women" and describe rape as a "political crime" (p. 229).

Feminist theory primarily addresses the social construction of gender within society. One of the fundamental components of feminism is "the idea that it is necessary to critique one's social context and deconstruct its discriminatory aspects" particularly with regard to patriarchy (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2012, p. 108). Feminist theorists state that men and women are biologically different from one another, but that this does not justify a rationale for power inequity. Millet (2000) also argued that the biological traits between men and women create an environment where men are seen as masculine and dominant and women viewed as feminine and subordinate, which generates a further division in the political sphere.

Key points of discussion within feminist theory are the meanings and definitions of "gender" and "sex" and the distinction between the two concepts. Feminist theorists describe an individual's sex as biological in nature, whereas the concept of gender is something that has been socially constructed by society. Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (2012) argue that gender roles can thus change over time and have different definitions between cultures. Tuana and Tong (1998) wrote, "radical feminists argue that women's oppression will not be eradicated simply by reforming political or economic institutions; rather, feminists must transform the entire gender system" (p. 131).

Feminism can also be examined through the spiritual and religious lens as well. Historically, religion has been a patriarchal system by which women were seen and treated as second-class citizens. This treatment of women is and was further justified and perpetuated by the interpretation of religious readings and texts. In an article regarding the images of God within Christianity, Elaine Pagels (2010) describes how Christian theologians recognize that within Christian religious texts "God" is not described as male or female, yet "the actual language they use daily in worship and prayer conveys a different message and gives distinct impression that God is thought of in exclusively masculine terms" (p. 248). Feminist theory in general challenges the traditional religious roles within a church. Pagels (2010) goes on to state, "men form the legitimate body of the community, while women will be allowed to participate only insofar as their own identity is denied and assimilated to that of the men" (p. 248).

Feminist theory and IPV. The basic premise behind feminist theory is the subjugation of women by men, which makes it a relevant theory to be used in conjunction with IPV. Feminist theorists posit that IPV is the outcome of male suppression of females within a patriarchal system in which men are the main offenders of violence against their female counterparts (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). Within today's society, male dominance is perpetuated by power differences, with men holding power and being viewed as superior to women. Gender, as created within a patriarchal society, cannot be easily eliminated because of the status differences between males and females within society (Anderson, 2005; Tong, 1998).

Feminist theory advocates the following questions: How do men oppress women, as a whole in society? How do masculine and feminine stereotypical traits in society create a hostile environment of male dominance over females? Is violence against women an acceptable form of dominance over women in order to maintain a patriarchal society? Feminist theory presents an

analysis of social constructions of gender within our society and ultimately calls for social justice and empowerment of women. Similarly, the linkage with IPV points to the power and control that abusers exert over their partners that typically involves a patriarchal perspective. By looking at society with a gender lens, we can better understand the impact that gender roles play in IPV. Feminist theorists argue that gender and control are important in order to understand the dynamics of IPV.

While feminist theorists acknowledge that women can be offenders of IPV, they contend that gender is still a pivotal factor in order to fully comprehend IPV. Researchers have found that specifically regarding the outcomes of IPV, some significant gender differences. For example, in a literature review conducted by Caldwell, Swan, and Woodbrown (2012), the researchers discovered that while both heterosexual men and women suffer detrimental mental health outcomes, many of the negative consequences of violence are more likely to be seen in women. Women who have experienced IPV are more likely to undergo effects of PTSD, suffer from depression, experience anxiety, and struggle with substance abuse than men.

Feminist theory has evolved and changed throughout the years. The advancement of feminist theory today focuses on the role of control in intimate partner relationships. Feminist theorists contend that physical violence is just one method that batterers use to assert control over a partner. They contend that exclusively focusing on violence misses the broader context of control and the culture of terror that is produced, which are inextricably linked to gender. Furthermore, researchers assert that physical violence, coupled with control, formulates relationships founded in terror and authoritarian power (Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

Limitations. In a controversial book, Mills (2003) argues that feminist theory assumes "…that all violence warrants a state response, and that women want to leave rather than stay in

their abusive relationships" (p. 6-7). Renzetti (1988) found that "abusive relationships tend to be characterized by an imbalance of power between partners, with particular status differentials – for example social class and intelligence – being strongly correlated with a high incidence of especially severe forms of physical and psychological abuse" (p. 397). Furthermore, through her research, Renzetti (1996) discovered that 26%–46% of lesbians have experienced IPV at the hands of a same-sex partner. Letellier (1994) explains the controversy between feminist theory and IPV:

> The feminist sociopolitical analysis of domestic violence may be helpful in understanding heterosexual battering, where, given the stark inequalities between men and women in society, gender is power, and men have explicit power over their female partners…It is an insufficient framework through which to understand gay and lesbian domestic violence. Rather than gender, the use of violence to maintain power and control over one's intimate partner, regardless of sexual orientation, must become the focal point of discussion and analysis for all forms of battering. (p. 104)

Despite the statistics regarding same-sex IPV, the pervasiveness of gender-role stereotyping continues to perpetuate the concept that only females can be victims and only males can be perpetrators of IPV (Brown, 2008).

Another limitation of feminist theory is grounded in the criminal justice system. As part of the second-wave feminist movement, feminism activists fought for "the establishment of programs and services for women who are battered, treatment for their male partners, and the involvement of the criminal justice system to hold men accountable for their violence" (McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007, p. 818). The involvement of the criminal justice system in the prosecution of male batterers was, again, rooted in the patriarchal values of society. In her book,

Mills (2003) contends that mainstream feminists used the criminal justice system as a proxy to mandate criminal justice interventions in IPV cases.

Application of feminist theory to present study. The utilization of feminist theory for the current study allows for the survivor to gain a sense of self-control, or empowerment, which is also an important piece of feminist theory. Female survivors taking back control of their lives by leaving the abusive relationship can help them heal from the lack of power they felt in their abusive relationship (McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007; Wood, 2014). A crucial part of feminist theory is the acknowledgment of gender differences in relationship violence, which may be part of the consciousness-raising that survivors experience in deciding to leave an abusive relationship (Israeli & Santor, 2000). The notion of empowerment is important to feminist therapy; it refers to one's increased ability to make and act on a personal choice.

In a study conducted by McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, and Rice (2007), researchers developed a new Integrative Feminist Model. The Integrative Feminist Model is ultimately committed to uncovering gender-based violence and oppression. McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, and Rice's (2007) Integrative Feminist model incorporates the original Feminist Theory ideologies as well as other pieces of the puzzle, in which they state that this model can "…provide greater detail and context, helping us understand the many forms that domestic violence can take. This model illustrates the shifts and expansions in thinking expressed by the focus group participants without violating core feminist values" (p. 825).

This research study specifically explores IPV between heterosexual couples. The utilization of an Integrative Feminist Model allows for the incorporation of traditional feminist theory modalities as well as recognizing the many pieces of the puzzle that make up the complex dynamics of IPV in society. In addition to utilizing a feminist approach to IPV, another unique

approach will be applied to better understand the leaving process for survivors of IPV – the transtheoretical model of change.

Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC)

In order to more fully comprehend the changes that a survivor experiences in leaving, or attempting to leave, a violence relationship, a discussion of the stages of change theory may be useful. It is human nature to change. Both as individuals and as a society, we experience some level of change everyday. Developed by Prochaska in 1979, the transtheoretical model of change (TMC) was established in order to develop the process of behavioral changes in a formalized manner in stages (Prochaska, 2008). Prochaska defined the process of change as a practice that occurs over time in a series of stages. Mohoney (1991a) wrote, "On several levels, of course, we are all seeking –and achieving – some form of change every moment of our lives" (p. 5).

Key constructs. Change can be as minute as changing clothes in the morning and as transformative as changing careers or changing where a person lives. In order to better understand the complexities of change, TMC specifically pertains to the change in a person's behavior. TMC has been used to help individuals understand the process of change such as smoking cessation and weight loss (Prochaska, 2008; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). Likewise, TMC can be utilized to evaluate what triggers a woman's readiness to change and leave an abusive relationship. The TMC model consists of various change processes as well as stages of change.

Change processes. Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) developed ten processes of change that receive various levels of application during the five stages of change. The processes of change address how the change will occur. Ten processes of change have been empirically supported and have been broadly divided into cognitive-affective processes and behavioral processes (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1985,2005). The

cognitive-affective processes: consciousness raising, self-liberation, social liberation, self-reevaluation, and environmental reevaluation. The behavioral processes include: counterconditioning, stimulus control, reinforcement management, dramatic relief, and helping relationships. The ten factors are briefly defined below:

1. Consciousness raising – becoming aware or gaining better understanding of the problem

2. Self-reevaluation – reassessment of one's own personal values in relation to the problem at hand

3. Social or environmental reevaluation – reexamination of how the problem affects one's environment

4. Self-liberation – increasing one's alternatives and ultimately choosing and committing to make a change

5. Social liberation – becoming more aware of the environment and identifying more problem-free lifestyle alternatives

6. Counter-conditioning – adapting and committing to alternative behaviors

7. Stimulus control – reorganization of the environment so that the probability of a problem behavior occurring is reduced

8. Reinforcement or contingency management – obtaining a form of reward for making changes

9. Dramatic relief – expressing feelings about the problem behavior and being inspired to change after an emotionally charged event

10. Helping relationship – seeking support from others in an effort to change and maintain the change

   Stages of change. The aspect of the TMC that has garnered the most attention, interest, and scrutiny has been the stages of change. Prochaska and DiClemente (1982) developed TMC

in a series of five different stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Each stage manifests through different sets of thought-processes and actions.

     Precontemplation. Precontemplation stage is the beginning in which the individual has no intention of making a change anytime in the near future (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) largely because he or she may either be unaware of the problem or not seriously considering any change. A person in the precontemplation stage will most likely be influenced by a consciousness-raising event (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992c), such as education of the problem. Aggressive forms of education or consciousness-raising by an outsider may cause the precontemplator to be even less likely to respond to the change. Furthermore, people in the precontemplation stage are usually in denial about having a problem and may resent individuals who endeavor to convince them otherwise. A person in the precontemplation stage usually attempts to change other people in their environment rather than themselves first. The precontemplation stage could last months or as long as years for an individual until he or she is ready to move into the contemplation stage (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). A review of the risks and benefits of change may help a person in the precontemplation stage to see the problem more clearly and move into the contemplation stage. Movement from the precontemplation to the contemplation stage may require clients to analyze the "pros" and "cons" of their problem behavior (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Compelling a precontemplator to engage in the process of reinforcement or contingency management, counter-conditioning, and stimulus control is likely to fail. Forced actions, such as attending therapy or educational groups, will likely result in the precontemplator going through the motions of the sessions but will likely return to original behavior (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992c).

     Contemplation. After a certain period of time, which may involve days, months, or years,

a person will then move into the contemplation stage. At this stage, an individual recognizes that he/she will possibly make a change sometime in the next six months (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). The contemplator is not quite committed to taking any action to change, but rather may weigh their options. At this stage, the problematic behavior may not have a significant enough consequence for the contemplator and, as a result, the cost of changing may not compensate for the benefits. Additionally, an individual in the contemplation stage may want to make a change but are uncertain of their ability to do so.

Unlike individuals in the precontemplation stage, contemplators may be more likely to respond positively to consciousness-raising methods. Confrontational methods of consciousness-raising may not cause them to become quite as defensive as precontemplators (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992c). Furthermore contemplators consistently utilize self-reevaluation. The self-reevaluation consists of a process in which they examine the problematic behavior in relation to their personal values and self-worth. Oftentimes, an analysis of their long-term goals helps a contemplator in the self-reevaluation process. Prochaska and DiClemente (1992c) found that people who struggle in the contemplation stage do so as a result of low self-efficacy with respect to their ability to change the problematic behavior. Self-liberation is the change process most likely to assist individuals who are stuck in the contemplation stage (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992c). Self-liberation involves increasing one's alternatives and ultimately choosing and committing to make a change. Examples of self-liberation include: self-improvement, networking, planning, encouraging one's self, and the use of willpower. If the balances of costs/benefits change for the individual through self-reevaluation and self-liberation, they may decide that a change is needed. Often times, they may wait until sufficient preparations have been made and they further solidify their intentions to change.

Preparation. The preparation stage may last for a few weeks or for a few hours. Helping relationships are important at any stage of change; however, it becomes exceptionally significant in the preparation stage. As an individual solidifies their commitment and prepares to take action, a helping relationship may be crucial. At the preparation stage of change, supportive relationships with family members, romantic partners, friends, and colleagues help to keep the individual focused on their change goal and provide him or her with encouragement and resources. The preparation stage is what the behavioral processes come into play - counterconditioning, stimulus control, reinforcement management, dramatic relief, and helping relationships. These processes can help an individual to better understand whether change is truly within their grasp. Many people may proclaim that they will make a change, but take few steps to follow through with the change. In a study conducted by Gollwitzer (1999), the researcher found setting or preparing for a goal ("goal intentions") is not enough (p. 494). An individual must then have "implementation intentions," which specify when, where, and how the goal intention will be carried out. Gollwitzer (1999) stated, "By forming goal intentions, people translate their noncommittal desires into binding goals. The consequence of having formed a goal intention is a sense of commitment that obligates the individual to realize the goal" (p. 494). By setting goals, an individual may then transition into the action stage more easily.

Action. Next, an individual transitions from the preparation to the action stage within the TMC model. In the action stage, people put his or her plans into effect and take direct action to correct the problematic behavior. They spend less time deliberating about the pros and cons of changing and instead focus on their goals. Prochaska and Velicer (1997) indicated that this was the stage at which there was some form of action taken. In the action stage, an individual has "made specific overt modifications in their life styles within the past 6 months" (Prochaska &

Velicer, 1997, p. 39). The action-based processes tend to create rapid changes. Unless the action-based processes are applied consistently over a long period of time, often as long as six months, their effects are short-lived (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999).

Maintenance. Finally, the maintenance stage is the last step in the TMC model, and this is the stage at which an individual is maintaining the change and trying to avoid relapse (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Sometimes the most important factor in being able to move into the maintenance stage is to continue to apply the change processes for some time after the problematic behavior has been eliminated or reduced. This period allows new habits to replace the problematic behavior and thus prevents relapses. Counter-conditioning, or adapting and committing to alternative behaviors, is a common behavioral process used in the maintenance stage. Stimulus control is the attempt to restructure one's environment so that the probability of a problem behavior occurring is reduced.

The action and maintenance stages are the phases at which an individual will likely be at the highest risk for relapse depending on the individual's environment. In effect, the maintenance stage is the continuation of the action stage. Often times, when breaking old behaviors and starting new ones, there may be setbacks or any number of other multifaceted outcomes from changing behaviors, such as withdrawal, depression, PTSD, and other consequences (Brown, 1997). For some, the maintenance stage may only last several months before relapse; for others, it can last much longer. When no further effort is needed to maintain the change, people are said to have terminated the change process.

DiClemente (1991) found that in order to experience the most successful change, individuals must pass through each stage of change in the proper order. Skipping stages can occur but will likely result in relapse. For example, moving directly from the contemplation stage

to the action stage will likely result in an inadequately planned attempt. In addition, individuals may go back and forth between the precontemplation and contemplation stages frequently. Additionally, individuals may relapse from the maintenance stage but then spend no time in the precontemplation stage (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999).

TMC and IPV. Researchers can apply TMC to a survivor's readiness and willingness to leave an abusive relationship. Several studies explore the relationship between TMC and IPV relationships (Alexander, Tracy, Radek, & Koverola, 2009; Anderson, 2003; Brown, 1997; Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell, & O'Campo, 2004; Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001; Bliss, Ogley-Oliver, Jackson, Harp, & Kaslow, 2008; Catallo, Jack, Ciliska, & Macmillan, 2012; Chang et al., 2006; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Murray, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). Survivors begin in precontemplation, not intending to change; within the precontemplation stage, the survivor may not even recognize the problem. Many times she may also be in denial that the problem even exists, or she may acknowledge that there is nothing that can be done about the problem at the present time (Brown, 1997). They may then move to contemplation, intending to change but only thinking about it. The contemplation stage is one in which the survivor is cautiously open to advice and thoughts of other people. The contemplation stage is an ambivalent stage where a survivor assesses the pros and cons to making a change (Brown, 1997). In some aspects, the contemplation stage may also be viewed as the procrastination stage. A survivor may then continue to the preparation stage, in which she begins to actively plan the change. Within this stage, the survivor has made some limited steps toward making the intended change. The action stage consists of overtly making changes, and into maintenance, solidifying change and resisting temptations to relapse.

A significant, positive effect of utilizing TMC with survivors of IPV is the specialization of survivor-specific interventions for each individual based upon her needs and the stage of change she is navigating (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). In a research study conducted by Anderson (2003), the researcher found evidence that "correct timing of interventions along with tailored communication and plans are necessary for the most effective outcomes" (p. 237). Furthermore, the TMC model provides social workers and advocates working with survivors a stronger progressive pattern of the survivor's behavior as she works toward a life free from violence. Social workers who grasp the TMC model and the process a survivor goes through when making a change may ultimately impact their perceptions of survivors.

In a qualitative study conducted by researchers Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell, and O'Campo (2004), they found that the beginning stages of TMC (precontemplation, contemplation) consisted of primarily cognitive processes – consciousness raising, thinking about leaving, contemplating their options, considering the costs, etc. The later stages of change (preparation, action, and maintenance) prompted more behavioral impacts for survivors such as talking with friends and family members about where they could go, packing up their belongings to leave, and seeking out employment. Furthermore, Burke and colleagues (2004) found that not all survivors went through all of the stages of change, which could suggest a nonlinear aspect to the TMC model for survivors of IPV.

Alexander, Tracy, Radek, and Koverola (2009) examined TMC with a sample of 754 female adults who were seeking help related to IPV. The researchers found several factors associated with being in an advanced stage of change such as greater economic resources, having more recent, severe experiences of physical violence, and positive feelings about their level of social support. In a more recent study, Catallo, Jack, Ciliska, and MacMillan, (2012) interviewed

a sample of nineteen survivors of IPV and used the TMC for mapping the decisions about disclosing IPV in emergency rooms. This study revealed one of the limitations to TMC when working with survivors of IPV - most participants' change processes over time were not linear, and some participants skipped some stages of the model altogether.

Previous qualitative research pertaining to IPV and TMC. In a study of 123 college women in sexually, physically, and/or psychologically abusive, heterosexual relationships, researchers investigated the leaving process (Edwards et al., 2012). The researchers created a narrative prompt for the women to respond to in writing for them to analyze further. The prompt was as follows: "We are interested in hearing your reasons for remaining with your Time 1 dating partner. If you are no longer with your Time 1 dating partner, please explain why the relationship ended. If you ended the relationship, please explain in detail why you made this decision" (p. 205). This type of approach involved independent content analysis. The researcher coded the participants' responses by using frequencies. Afterwards, some of the codes were then combined or split into different categories or themes. The average length of the responses by the participants was 56 words. After analysis, the research identified 4 distinct groups: (1) 86% of the participants (n = 106) consisted of women who stayed with their abusive partners with no uncertainty about this decision; (2) 5% of the women (n = 6) stayed with their abusive partners, but did suggest reservations about this decision; (3) 4% of the women (n = 5) had left their partners for reasons unrelated to the abuse; and (4) 5% of the women (n = 6) indicated that they left their partners because of the abuse. The researchers utilized the TMC as a means of understanding the different groups. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that a person's level of commitment plays a larger role in relationship investment and satisfaction.

In another qualitative research study, Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, and Maman

(2001) conducted face-to-face interviews with 78 women who were either currently in an abusive relationship or had a recent history of abuse with the goal of indirectly exploring the role of the TMC. Participants were recruited in a hospital setting, an outpatient drug treatment center, a homeless shelter, a community center, and an HIV primary-care clinic. The questions the researchers asked did not directly pertain to the TMC. The qualitative research questions pertained primarily on the survivor's perspectives of the abuse, such as, steps to end or stop the abuse, what the abuse was like, and the process of leaving, if applicable. Researchers stated, "Because the study was not originally designed to explore the application of the TMC, we did not probe or ask questions that would have allowed us to explore the change process" (p. 1149). Burke and colleagues (2001) broke the results up into sections based on the TMC stages of change. Ultimately, the researcher found that their study supports the notion that survivors of IPV experience the TMC stages when leaving an abusive relationship.

Another qualitative research study investigated the emotions of survivors of IPV in the context of leaving abusive male partners (Enander, 2011). The researchers recruited a total of 22 participants for the study, which resulted in 47 interviews. Using feminist theory and cognitive dissonance theory, the researcher discovered a process in which survivors originally believe the abusers are good, but violence leads to a cognitive-emotive dissonance on the part of the survivor. Over time, beliefs about the abuser change from positive to negative, and efforts are made to change emotions from warm to cold. Ultimately, the leaving process occurs when the cognitive dissonance is so significant that it overcomes the positive emotions a survivor has for the abuser.

Building upon the previous study, Enander and Holmberg (2008) conducted a qualitative research study in which female survivors had left abusive partners utilizing the same 22

participant interviews. The researchers found the leaving process could be broken up into three distinct stages: the physical process of breaking up, which covers action, the emotional process of becoming free, and finally the cognitive process of coming to an understanding regarding leaving an abusive relationship. Additionally, researchers found, through the qualitative interviews, that crucial turning points for leaving include when the situation is a matter of life or death and when someone else is at risk.

Limitations. The experiences of survivors in abusive relationships are normally active, yet nonlinear (Burke et al., 2004; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). The process of leaving an abusive relationship is not a linear process, and survivors may return to the relationship many times before ending it for good (Alexander et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2006). Moreover, another limitation to the TMC model is the difficulty in identifying what specific stage the survivor is in. While one aspect of the survivor's life may be her moving towards the next stage in the readiness model, another aspect may be moving away from readiness (Cluss, et al., 2006). For example, an increased severity in violence may move the survivor toward the next stage of change, while inadvertently her children and their needs may force her to move away from readiness to leave.

By utilizing the TMC in relation to IPV, there is the potential for a survivor to experience overlapping stages and behaviors within them. Because of this, determining what interventions to use at each stage may be challenging (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). Experiences of IPV are extremely diverse, so it is important in both research and practice to avoid overly prescriptive, or linear, approaches to working with survivors (Alexander et al., 2009). Looking at the movement that survivors take between the TMC stages may be much more useful than attempting to identify a specific stage a survivor is experiencing (Chang et al., 2006; Cluss et al., 2006). The processes and dynamics that occur between stages for survivors may be of upmost importance to

explore further. With this in mind, researchers have begun to identify "turning points" that may lead to movement in the process of ending an abusive relationship (Murray, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015).

Application of TMC to the present study. The utilization of TMC in this study will provide a means of evaluating and supporting a woman's readiness and ability to leave an abusive relationship. Furthermore, an application of TMC will help to better understand the types of turning points that may prompt survivors to begin to take steps toward leaving the relationship and achieving safety. To this end, the purpose of this study is to understand how survivors of IPV describe the leaving process and specifically any turning points they experienced that ultimately led them to end their abusive relationships and seek safety.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory (SET), developed by sociologists in the early 1960s, provides a means to better understand the interactions between human relationships. At a basic level, social exchange theory can be described as an economic examination of non-economic relationships (Emerson, 1976). SET consists of understanding the exchanges, or social interactions, between human behaviors. The theory arose out of theories of economics, specifically neoclassical economics, which emphasizes the maximization of benefits and minimization of costs on individuals in a marketplace environment. Furthermore, SET builds off of rational-choice theory, which states that individuals who make decisions and choices that are most cost-efficient for them dictate social behavior. Similarly, SET's primary principle exemplifies that "humans in social situations choose behaviors that maximize their likelihood of meeting self-interests in those situations" (Chibucos, Leite, & Weis, 2005, p. 137). That is to say, in order for a relationship to continue or be maintained, an individual must deem that the rewards of the

relationship are greater than the costs associated with that relationship. Furthermore, Pfouts (1978) explained that according to SET, the satisfaction, or rewards, in a relationship not only have to outweigh the costs, but the comparative rewards and costs of alternative relationships are also considered when weighing the cost/benefits.

The SET model studies the interpersonal interactions between individuals and environments. The model particularly emphasizes the effects of power in relationships as well as the costs and benefits of social exchanges (Homans, 1974). George Homans initially developed SET and outlined three propositions for the theory:

1. Success proposition: "For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action" (p. 16).

2. Stimulus proposition: "If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli, has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the present stimuli are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action, now" (p. 22-23).

3. Deprivation–satiation proposition: "The more often in the recent past a person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him" (p. 29).

Exchanges between individuals involve the use of rewards (e.g., approval or encouragement) and punishments (e.g., criticism or neglect) in order to obtain mutually beneficial exchanges (Cook, 1987).

SET key concepts. There are several key concepts within the SET model. SET pertains largely to issues of power and dependence as well as costs/benefits of social exchanges. A more detailed description of power and costs/benefits is given below.

Power. A significant social exchange theorist, Peter Blau, defined power as "the ability of persons or groups to impose their will on others despite resistance through deterrence either in the forms of withholding regularly supplied rewards or in the form of punishment" (Blau, 1964, p. 117). Other prominent SET theorists, Cook and Emerson (1987), also wrote, "one person's power resides in the dependency of another" (p. 101). Researchers have found that when two individuals equally depend on each other, they provide an equally balanced, power relationship. If, however, the power dynamic between two people is unequal and one person is more dependent on the other, there is an imbalance of power (Cook & Yamagishi, 1992; Molm, 1997; Molm, 1994). Furthermore, the individual who holds more power will receive more of their desired outcomes than the person with less power (Cook & Emerson, 1987; Markovsky, Wilier & Patton, 1988). Molm (1994) found that where an imbalance in power exists, unhealthy norms, such as coercion, resentment, and lack of communication, become the standard basis of the relationship. Furthermore, "those with less to gain in terms of meeting their basic needs through a social exchange tend to hold more power in that exchange" (Chibucos, Leite, and Weis, 2005).

Blau (1964) believed that coercion and other forms of intimidation were a form of power that one person exerted over another. According to SET, coercive exchange occurs when one individual has control over negative outcomes. When an abusive person is coercive against his partner, he rewards her by withholding expected punishment (Molm, 1997). The survivor has the choice to respond to coercion by submitting or retaliating. Molm (1997) maintains that it is doubtful that retaliating against an abuser's coercive behaviors would result in a decrease in such actions in the future.

Cost/benefit. Another key concept of SET is the perspective that behaviors are driven by an internal cost/benefit analysis of any given situation. The desire to seek rewards, or benefits,

and avoid costs is intrinsically programmed in the human (Homans, 1974). The more a person is

dependent on another, the more benefits there are to lose. The dependent person cannot afford to

take actions that would affect their access to the resources upon which they are dependent.

Chibucos, Leite, and Weis (2005) describe an individual's cost/benefit phenomenon as a

calculated response that individuals have in reaction to a social exchange with another person

(2005). Additionally, Chibucos, Leite, and Weis (2005) explain that individuals "exist as both

rational actors and reactors in social exchanges. This assumption reflects the perspective that

social exchange theory largely attends to issues of decision making" (p. 137). It is for this reason

that social workers often times utilized SET with survivors of IPV – to give them decision-

making power back.

SET and IPV. The purpose behind using SET in relation to IPV pertains to the level of

dependence partners have on each other. SET offers the theoretical framework that dependency

can often times create an imbalance in power between individuals, which can lead to

opportunities for coercion and control over the dependent individual. If social workers consider

utilizing interventions that are based on a SET model rather than learned helplessness, the SET

model would emphasize client self-determinism and rational thought as they weigh the costs and

benefits of their situation. Furthermore, the use of a SET model emphasizes interventions that not

only provide women with the resources they need to make positive changes in their lives but also

build self-sufficiency and independence. Accordingly, SET also would provide a framework that

promotes, rather than discourages the dignity of women in abusive relationships.

Rewards that exist in abusive relationships have also been shown to be important to a

woman's decision to continue or dissolve the abusive relationship. As discussed previously in a

review of the literature, economic rewards have been found to be important benefits to women in

abusive relationships (Davis, Hagen, & Early, 1994; Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Johnson, 1992; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Kalmuss & Straus, 1982; Kim & Gray, 2008; Mills & Malley-Morrison, 1998; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983; Moss et al., 1997; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Strube & Barbour, 1983, 1984). Strube and Barbour's research (1983, 1984) focused on financial influences of IPV. As an objective measure of economic dependency within the study, the researchers utilized women who were employed outside of the home. Subjective elements of economic dependence included a survivor's self-reported beliefs of her level of financial dependence on the abuser. At the follow-up interview 2 years later, Strube and Barbour (1983) found that approximately 29% of survivors weighed the financial costs of leaving and stayed in the abusive relationship.

In addition to economic rewards, other rewards for the survivor include the "honeymoon phase" or the good parts of the relationship. Homans (1974) stated:

> If the value of the reward (the honeymoon phase or good part of the relationship) of an action is very high, but the cost (the explosive, violent episode) is very high too, especially if both the reward and cost are uncertain, then a man may be overcome by anxiety and 'freeze up' – he may be unable to perform any action at all. (p. 32)

Other rewards that a survivor might experience in an abusive relationship include parental rewards, such as economic stability for her children and the role of a father figure in the children's lives (Moe, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). Ultimately, survivors choose a cost/benefit strategy that is most advantageous for themselves and their children based on an assessment of many different variables such as their safety needs and practical capabilities of leaving (Strube, 1988).

Moreover, Gelles (1983) proposes that perpetrators may also apply a cost/benefit analysis when determining whether to abuse their partner or not. The abuser may contemplate whether or not the rewards for violence outweigh the costs, in which case violence is more likely to occur. Reasons why some costs may not outweigh the benefits for an abuser include no legal consequences, no retaliation from the victim, a lack of economic resources for the victim, and an unwillingness by family, friends, neighbors, and communities to become involved in assisting the survivor (Gelles, 1983). Molm (1994) conducted a quantitative research study that explored the impact that punishment had on an individual's overall reward and found, "Punishment that was both strong and consistent produced the highest frequency of reward exchange and the least negative affect toward the partner" (p. 75).

Limitations. The desire to encapsulate social exchanges in a succinct and efficient manner has encouraged theorists to turn to theories of economics to "extend the theory beyond market transactions to exchanges of symbolic and non-fungible resources such as social approval, security, and even love" (Macy and Flache, 1995, p. 73). On the other hand, there are several inherent flaws in a model that combines economic and social exchanges. Zafirovski (2005) makes the following arguments to SET. One of the limitations to SET is the strict adherence of economic assumptions may not always translate well to social exchanges between individuals or groups. Social relations oftentimes consist of missing or deficient information, which would cause inefficiencies in an economic system. Furthermore, individuals in a social system frequently make decisions based on their interactions with others (often guided by cost-benefit analyses), which can drastically impact the outcomes of their decisions. Finally, one of the primary critiques of SET is the lack of attention to cultural aspects of social relations (Cook, 2000). SET neglects culture context and variations of cultures. Furthermore, one of the primary

concepts of SET is a costs/benefits analysis; however, cultures differ widely in their perceptions of costs and benefits.

Application of SET to the present study. By utilizing SET as a foundation for understanding power and costs/benefits, this study will provide an awareness of the impact that costs and benefits have on a survivor who is attempting to leave an abusive relationship. An exploration of the interactions between feminist theory, TMC, and SET allows for a thoughtful approach to explore the various influences that occur when a survivor decides to leave an
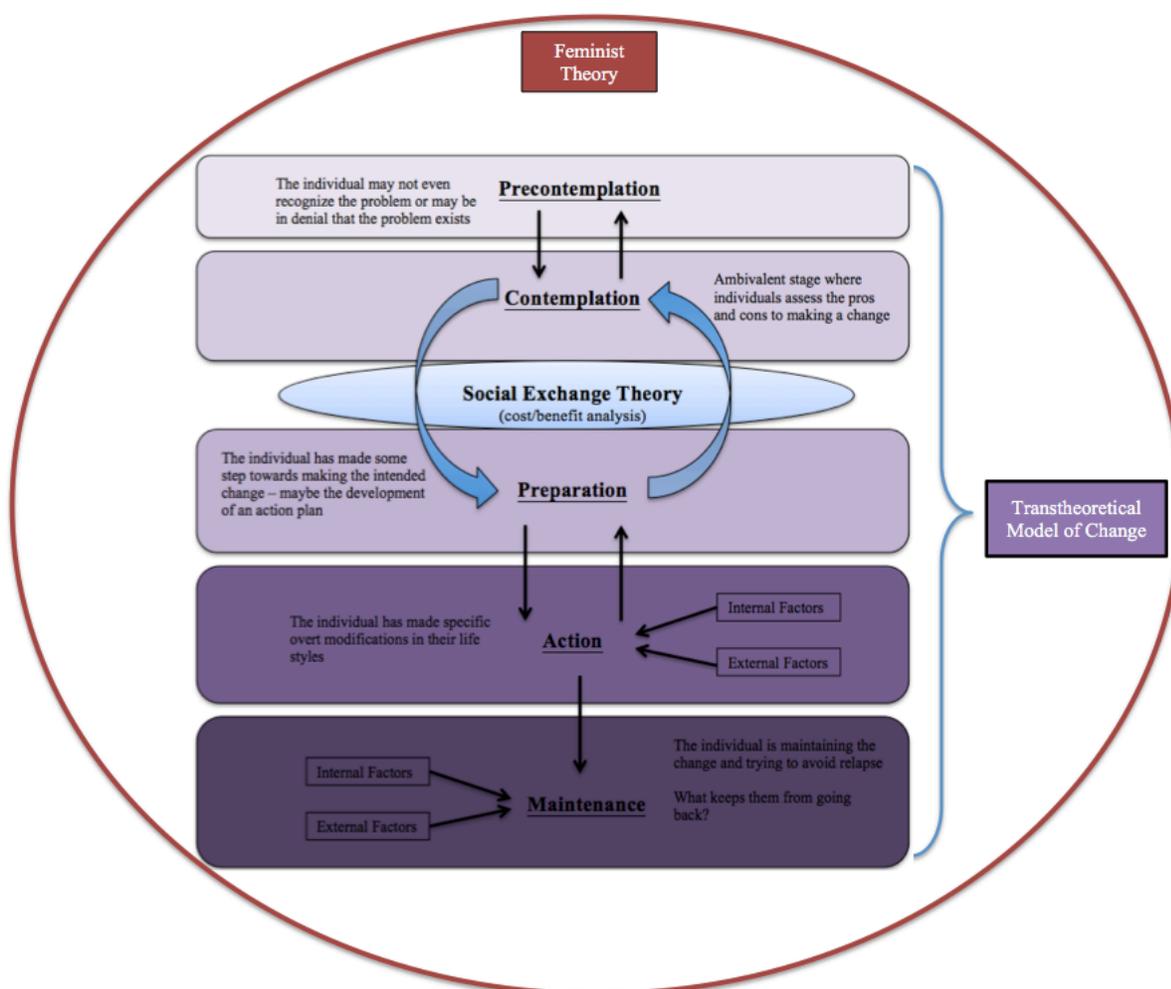
abusive relationship. The following figure demonstrates the interaction between the theoretical models utilized in this study.

Figure 2. Interaction between feminist theory, TMC, and SET.

Feminist theory, the TMC model, and the SET model provide us with much needed information that can be utilized to inform the development and improvement of interventions geared towards aiding survivors of IPV during the process of leaving and to influence policy decisions that impact survivors of IPV. Learning about the impact of TMC and SET on women's decisions during these times is important in order to evaluate existing interventions and to create new ones that facilitate survivors' ability to achieve their desired goals. This study hopes to accomplish this by interviewing women currently residing in a domestic violence shelter and women currently living in a long-term transitional housing program. Since women currently in a shelter can vary on whether they will return to the abuser or not, this study aims to explore the change processes a survivor experiences as well as the internal cost/benefit analysis survivors conduct with regard to the phenomenon of leaving an abusive relationship.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of survivors of intimate

partner violence (IPV) who have left an abusive relationship. The researcher used

phenomenological and directed content analysis approaches to understand the core experiences

of survivors. Through the study, an attempt was made to gain the essence and meanings of

strategies used by survivors to leave an abusive relationship. The researcher conducted semi-

structured in-depth individual interviews with survivors transitioning out of abusive relationships

who were residing at emergency domestic violence shelters or in transitional housing. The

purpose of utilizing a qualitative research approach was to understand the lived experiences of

women who have left an abusive relationship with regard to their decision-making and the

barriers that they encountered in their pursuit of a life free from violence. Research has shown

that at least 33% of women in emergency shelters return to their abusive partners immediately,

and approximately 60% of survivors return within the first two months (Anderson & Saunders,

2003; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Gordon, Burton, & Porter, 2004; Griffing et al., 2002; Hilbert, &

Hilbert, 1984; Martin et al., 2000; Schutte, Malouff & Doyle, 1988; Strube, 1988). Given these

statistics, it is important to understand a survivor's decision-making process when leaving an

abusive relationship, and it is equally important to understand how they are able to maintain the

change. This research study analyzed results from survivors in both an emergency shelter as well

as a long-term transitional housing program in order to incorporate experiences from a diverse

sample of survivors. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the leaving process in-

depth with survivors of IPV, as well as to look for potential differences between the stages of change between women who were in transitional housing and women who were in an emergency shelter setting.

Phenomenological analysis was utilized in order to better understand the first research question pertaining to the lived experiences of women leaving an abusive relationship. Phenomenological inquiry seeks to describe and explore the complexities of a phenomenon in an intimate way. In this case, it was applied to the lived experiences of survivors, who served as the primary element under investigation. Directed content analysis was used to understand the role that the transtheoretical model of change (TMC) contributed to a survivor leaving an abusive relationship; the role that concepts of social exchange theory (SET), namely power and costs/benefits, had on a survivor leaving; and the internal and external factors that contributed to a survivor leaving an abusive relationship.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored through qualitative interviews with survivors of IPV:

1) What are the experiences of leaving an abusive relationship for survivors in an emergency shelter and transitional housing?

2) What impact, if any, do the stages of the transtheoretical model of change play in influencing a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship?

3) How does social exchange theory's cost/benefit analysis play a role in the decision-making process a survivor makes when deciding whether or not to leave an abusive relationship?

4)   When deciding to leave an abusive relationship, what role do internal and external factors play in that decision-making process?

Phenomenological Philosophies

A qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to gain the essence of what the participants experienced, as well as what the participants had in common (Creswell, 2013; Munhall, 2012; Yin, 2015). Phenomenological qualitative research was designed for researchers to collect data from participants who experienced a similar phenomenon and cultivated a depiction of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The context in which the survivors live, work, and experience life played an important role in shaping their worldview.

A phenomenological research approach is intended to identify and explore. It allows the researchers to gain the essence of what the participants experienced as well as what the participants had in common (Creswell, 2013). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) described the purpose of phenomenology as a method to better understand a unique aspect of a situation that is distinguishable from others. Groenewald (2004) stated, "The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (p. 5).

In order to better understand a specific phenomenon, a researcher must look at the situated context from an individual's worldview. The phenomenon exists within a specific environment of time and space. Each individual's reality is going to differ from anyone else's. Munhall (2012) stated:

We also know that two perceptions are operating here – not an objective truth – two subjectivities, interacting and forming an intersubjective space. Two people are seeing the world through two different social constructions of reality and are even using

language differently, though there might be an assumption that they are using the words

in similar ways. The two people have different experiences during this encounter.

Perhaps the most important phenomenological realization is that the two different

perceptions are going to result in two different interpretations of what seemingly looks

like one reality. (p. 116)

This is the basis of phenomenology–to understand an individual's reality and how their reality

and perceptions differ from others'.

For the main purpose of this qualitative research study, the research method that was used

is hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology as defined by Max van Manen (1997). Van

Manen's (1997) description of hermeneutic phenomenology was one that consists of human

science research, which included the philosophical process of researching and interpreting texts

and interviews by individuals. This study focused on the lived experiences of survivors of IPV,

which was consistent with van Manen's human science research. A phenomenological research

study entails a methodical, scientific study of a particular human phenomenon. Van Manen

(1997) described the purpose of phenomenology as discovering and describing the meaning of

the human experience as it is so that a greater understanding of the phenomena can be achieved.

The lived experiences of individuals give a deeper meaning to the phenomenon. By using

methods such as questioning, reflecting, and perceiving, phenomenology research allows for a

closer, more insightful lived experience (Benner, 1994; Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; Crabtree

and Miller, 1999; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007;

van Manen, 1997). Cohen and colleagues (2000) described hermeneutic, or interpretative,

phenomenology as an attempt to understand and/or explore meanings and an understanding of an

individual's experiences beyond basic description. Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology

not only involves the individual's personal experiences, but also the context in which the individual exists in the world in relation to the broader social, cultural, and political environments (Cohen et al., 2000; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; van Manen, 1997; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

      Interpretive phenomenology. Interpretative phenomenology endeavors to better understand the nature of a phenomenon by deducing the perceptions and lived experiences of people who experienced it. It applies a methodical approach to reveal and explain the meanings of the lived experiences. Interpretative phenomenology emphasizes a defined and organized method of questioning individuals and then interpretation, which then reveals the underlying meanings of the lived experience through interpretation by the researcher. Finally, it is a fundamental method of study that is particularly relevant to social work practice and research. Interacting face to face with people and utilizing a holistic approach are crucial components to social work as well as interpretative phenomenology. This research approach allows for everyday experiences to become a tool for expanding the knowledge and understanding of human lives by studying the characteristics of these experiences (Cohen, et al., 2000; van Manen, 1997). By utilizing an interpretative phenomenological approach, a researcher understands that the participants, not the researcher, are the experts in their own lives and of their own stories and experiences (Cohen et al., 2000; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; van Manen, 1997).

      This study incorporated van Manen's (1997) systematic structure as a model for data collection and analysis. When conducting phenomenological research methods, the research structures are a practical approach to the research rather than a strict set of policies and procedures. This approach assisted the researchers in gaining a better understanding into the essence of the phenomena and discovering the meaning and the individuality of the lived

experiences. Van Manen (1997) separated interpretative phenomenological research into six research activities, which consist of: 1) "turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world"; 2) "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it"; 3) "reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon"; 4) "describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting"; 5) "maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon"; 6) "balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (van Manen, 1997, p. 29).

Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
Within this step of the research process, van Manen (1997) identified three activities that enhance the researcher's interest to the phenomenon in study, as well as determine the researcher's faithfulness to the philosophical foundations of phenomenology. The three activities include: orienting oneself to the phenomenon, formulating the phenomenological questions, and stating explicit assumptions and pre-understandings.

Orientating oneself to the phenomenon. The orientation to the phenomenon consists of determining whether or not the occurrence of interest is a true phenomenon experienced by individuals. Van Manen (1997) stated that the phenomenon is established "by the questioning of the essential nature of a lived experience: a certain way of being in the world" (p. 39). As a social worker, the researcher familiarized herself with the phenomenon of interest, which consisted of the experiences of survivors leaving an abusive relationship. The phenomenon of leaving an abusive relationship is a true human experience that has essential meaning to be discovered and interpreted.

Formulating research questions. The next research activity consists of formulating phenomenological research questions. In this study the main research question asked is: What are

the lived experiences of survivors leaving an abusive relationship who live in an emergency shelter or transitional housing? This research question addresses the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of survivors leaving an abusive relationship.

Stating explicit assumptions and pre-understandings. The third research activity involves stating explicit assumptions and pre-understandings. Van Manen (1997) stated that in phenomenological research, the researcher may know too much about the phenomenon of interest therefore, hypotheses, assumptions, and existing knowledge of the area of study may influence or bias the research during the interpretation or analysis process. Consequently, van Manen (1997) recommended that researchers familiarize themselves with their own beliefs, opinions, biases, and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under investigation up front and throughout the research process. This process will assist the researcher in identifying areas of bias and prejudice and the researcher will be less likely to impose their biases on interpretations of the meanings of the lived experiences for the participants in the study. This process is also known as bracketing in the qualitative research field.

Bracketing. Qualitative research involves seeking a further, in-depth understanding and description of life experiences, which includes technical analysis of qualitative findings by the researcher. Creswell (2013) stated that "whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (p. 15). Phenomenology exemplifies a methodological process within qualitative research where subjectivity and investigator bias is inevitable. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance and relevance of internal views and opinions that influence the research process. Credibility and trustworthiness within qualitative research pertain to the bias that a researcher brings to the process. When a qualitative researcher engages in the qualitative process, certain natural biases

may surface that the researcher has. Every individual has their own worldview that they bring into the research process, which creates biases. The identification and recognition of bias, or bracketing, is what sets a strong qualitative researcher apart and helps to establish credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In order for researchers to maintain an open mind, they are asked to "bracket" their knowledge and preconceived notions or ideas about a particular subject area. By clearing the mind and "unknowing," researchers are more freely able to actively listen to the participants without preconceived biases. Converse (2012) stated, "The essence of the phenomenon exists independently of the researcher and can be discovered through 'bracketing' out the researcher's preconceived assumptions of the phenomenon" (p. 30). It is crucial for researchers to recognize and then manage these internal prejudices or biases that may influence the phenomenological study being conducted (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). In order to obtain a genuine understanding of the shared lived experiences of study participants and in pursuance of mitigating the influence of bias and preconception, certain strategies will be implemented to reduce the likelihood of prejudgment. By bracketing, or separating, personal experiences while working with survivors of IPV, the researcher established credibility and controlled any personal assumptions and beliefs. Since the researcher cannot fully separate from the research process and the participants, she implemented two specific measures that assisted in limiting subjectivity throughout the research process. The primary method used was journaling throughout the process in order to identify personal subjectivity. A secondary method used was to consult with mentors and experts within the field to discuss various aspects of the research process. This allowed for an authentic and open discussion about any biases and presuppositions the researcher may have had.

Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. The second research activity that van Manen (1997) suggests is that researchers need to investigate experiences as lived in the natural world rather than how they are conceptualized. The data collection process is the stage at which this research activity is most likely to occur as the researcher goes into the everyday world where people are living through a variety of phenomena to collect the firsthand accounts and descriptions of the lived experience. Van Manen (1997) stated, "The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience" (p. 62). In this study, the researcher is interested in collecting the lived experiential aspects of leaving an abusive relationship from survivors who lived within the context of IPV.

Reflecting on essential themes that characterize the phenomenon. The purpose of this step in the research activity is to understand the essence of the phenomenon, which "involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 77). Meanings of a phenomenon are multi-faceted, and the individual who is experiencing the phenomenon communicates these meanings in a variety of ways. Reflecting on the phenomenon of interest then transitions to identifying and determining themes that have emerged. In this study, the researcher ascertained themes that characterized the lived experiences of survivors who have left an abusive relationship.

Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. According to van Manen (1997), writing is a fundamental component to the phenomenological research process; it

occurs throughout the research process, and the phenomenological text is the overall objective of the research process. According to van Manen (1997), "The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible" (p. 125-126). Writing and rewriting are key elements to the phenomenological research process; therefore, language is significant in order to gain to the essence of the phenomenon. Thoughtful listening to participants' words, expressions, and nonverbal behaviors is imperative in this step of the research activities. Attentive listening assists with the writing and rewriting processes with the hope of producing an insightful text that uncovers the significance of the phenomenon under study. This researcher attempted to highlight the experiences of survivors who have left an abusive relationship and the meaning of those experiences as told from the survivor's own perspective by re-reading, writing out main themes, and rewriting as the themes expanded.

Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon. This research activity involves maintaining a level of passion and interest in the phenomenon of interest. The researcher worked with survivors of IPV who have been in abusive relationships and after they have left the abusive relationship. By maintaining a commitment to the phenomenon, further discovery of the meaning behind the experiences of the survivors may unfold. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a desire to portray the true nature of the survivors' experience through the survivors' own voices. The researcher upheld a level of openness to the meaning of the survivors' experiences of the phenomenon of study so that a broader understanding is revealed (van Manen, 1997).

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. Van Manen (1997) explained that throughout the research process, the researcher must balance the larger picture of

the phenomenon of study against the significance of the smaller pieces of study. Similarly, the parts must consistently be measured in relation to the overall phenomenon. This process of revealing the meaning between the parts and the whole occurs continuously throughout the development of the research and it is never finished.

Van Manen's (1997) methodological research activities serve as a guide for a phenomenological research process. This model allowed the researcher to better understand and interpret the meaning behind the phenomenon experienced by survivors of IPV. In this study, van Manen's (1997) six methodological steps were utilized to conduct a hermeneutic phenomenological research study in an attempt to reveal and decipher the lived experiences of survivors of IPV who have left an abusive relationship.

Interpretive phenomenology data analysis. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) described the data analysis process as "a process in which qualitative researchers rely mainly on their own intuition and personal judgment to analyze the data that have been collected" (p. 317). Van Manen's (1997) approach to analyzing consists of four processes. The four research activities that comprise van Manen's approach to data analysis were also previously discussed during the research design discussion. These research activities include "reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, and balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (van Manen, 1997, p. 30-31). Van Manen was careful to not describe these processes as linear stages but rather activities that coexist and interact simultaneously.

Considering the population under investigation, this is an appropriate data analysis strategy for this study due to its ability to establish, "themes that are embodied and dramatized in

the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). The researcher's reasoning behind utilizing van Manen's (1990) technique for identifying themes can be summarized by the ultimate goal of finding the overall significance. Van Manen (1990) stated, "What sentencious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?" (p. 93). A thematic analysis approach allows for the researcher to look for similarities that will provide a deeper meaning of overall thematic trends and the underlying concepts that connect them.

The interviews with the participants were recorded and then transcribed. After transcription, a review of the transcription was conducted for accuracy purposes. Furthermore, the transcription notes were then read through several times in order to make comments and identify contradictions, differences, or similarities. As the researcher endeavored to isolate particular themes within the interview text, the researcher utilized van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic analysis of the texts toward identifying themes. Van Manen (1990) described three approaches to identifying the phenomena of interest including: 1) "the holistic or sentencious approach"; 2) "the selective or highlighting approach"; and 3) "the detailed or line-by-line approach" (p. 92-93). Analyzing the data from a larger, holistic approach and then moving further into a more detailed approach allowed for the researcher to investigate the shared phenomenon and to extricate the essence of the phenomenon experienced by the survivors (van Manen, 1990). The researcher incorporated all of van Manen's data analysis approaches. The researcher began by reading the transcripts as a whole multiple times, documenting notes, and finally generating codes based on themes found pertaining to the essence or significance of the phenomenon of leaving an abusive relationship. In order to do so, the researcher identified specific selections within the transcript text that is representative of the leaving process. The

final approach van Manen described was a detailed, line-by-line approach to analyzing the data. The researcher carefully read each line of the transcripts in order to determine if any parts exposed something about the leaving process a survivor experienced. Finally, data analysis transpired in a method "that [was] both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Additionally meanings were formulated from significant statements and phrases, and were then organized into clusters. Thematic statements that represented the experiences of leaving an abusive relationship were identified. Using all of the phrases and sentence clusters, the data were reduced until essential themes emerged. A second researcher reviewed the thematic descriptions in order to validate the reliability of the significant statements.

Van Manen (1997) emphasized the importance of discovering vital themes by utilizing an imaginative interpretive process. He believed that in order to uncover the lived meanings of a phenomenon, it is essential to use free imaginative variation to substantiate whether the themes belong to the phenomenon. The imaginative variation process allows for the researcher to begin examining the meaning of the phenomenon by asking questions in order to recognize and remove superfluous features of the phenomenon from the text. Creative or imaginative variation lasts until the collective understanding, or the essence of the phenomenon of interest, has been generated. This allowed the researcher to develop a chronicle of the accounts of the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Benner, 1994; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; van Manen, 1997).

Strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology. Phenomenological research allows for a deep and clear understanding of a phenomenon that individuals experience. This kind of complex and rich data that helps to understand an individual's or group of individual's lived experiences cannot be found in quantitative research methods. The significant statements generated from the

participant's own words allow for a better understanding of concepts (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the data collection process of a phenomenological study consists of personable, one-on-one interviews with individuals, in which the researcher can develop a rapport with the participant (Munhall, 2012).

While there are many benefits to utilizing a phenomenological research approach, there are several challenges as well. From a practical standpoint, the time required to interview and gather data from participants can be lengthy (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, Creswell (2013) argued, "The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding" (p. 83). As far as analysis goes, the difficulty lies in different interpretations of meanings. A group of researchers is important in qualitative research in order to limit biases in analyzing the data. Some argue that true bracketing is impossible and that a new definition of bracketing is needed (Creswell, 2013). Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, and Sixsmith (2013) state, "If bracketing is understood from a pure, Husserlian perspective, then it could be argued that it does not 'fit' within interpretative phenomenology, as it is impossible to set aside conscious and unconscious thoughts, beliefs and influences" (p. 18). As with any qualitative research study, the findings from the study cannot be generalized across an entire population, but rather may help with theory or model building with a specific population (Creswell, 2013).

Directed Content Analysis

Directed content analysis, also called qualitative content analysis and deductive analysis, starts with a theoretical framework with which to test the qualitative data against (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Schreier, 2014). Drisko and Maschi (2016) defined content analysis as, "a family of research techniques for making systematic, credible, or valid and

replicable inferences from texts and other forms of communication" (p. 7). Krippendoff (2004) stated, "Content analysts who start with a research question read texts for a purpose" (p. 32). This deductive approach is utilized in qualitative research as a means of testing a previous theory or to compare outcomes at different time periods (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Overall, directed, or qualitative, content analysis suggests a methodical process for examining and describing meanings within data as well as identifying patterns within texts (Morgan, 1993; Tesch, 1990). Elo and Kyngäs (2008) describe deductive content analysis as a process by which the structure of analysis is developed based on the knowledge from previous studies or theories. The researcher also utilized tables to display the count of how many participants experienced each of the themes and subthemes.

Directed content analysis begins with a theoretical framework or prior literature, in this case TMC, SET, and internal and external factors, and analyzes the data with a guided approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The goal of using a directed content analysis approach is to substantiate an existing theoretical framework in the researcher's area of interest. For this particular study, the researcher aimed to both validate and extend the theories of TMC and SET. The TMC framework was used as the starting point for the analysis of the data pertaining to the second research question; the main concepts associated with SET, namely power and costs/benefits, was used as the foundation of analysis for the third research question; and finally the literature pertaining to internal and external factors that contribute to leaving formed the basis of the analysis for the fourth research question.

For the purposes of this study, the research utilized the TMC, SET, and internal/external factors as concept-driven themes and then incorporated the data from the participants into these themes. Shreier (2014) states:

A key objective of qualitative content analysis is to provide a good description of the material. Concept-driven categories alone, however, may leave part of this material unaccounted for. This is why concept-driven categories are usually combined with data-driven categories. One way to do this is to create main categories in a concept-driven way and to add subcategories in a data-driven way. (p. 176).

Participants might not have used the TMC and SET-specific terminology; therefore, a directed analysis was utilized. Chan et al. (2012) explained that concept-driven categories consist of those that stem from the literature or theoretical frameworks, whereas data-driven concepts are the participant's own experiences that emerge from the interview. The researcher captured the meanings of the participants' narratives in the codes, though data-driven content and imposed theoretical concept-driven data in the study as well (Chan et al., 2012).

Similar to the van Manen approach, this analysis method is systematic in that it requires a certain sequence of steps (Schreier, 2014). Schreier (2014) described eight steps to directed, or qualitative, content analysis. The first step consisted of deciding on a research question or, in this study, several researcher questions that were already determined. Furthermore, the researcher had already completed the second step, which consisted of selected material for study. The material selected for this study included transcripts from one-on-one interviews with survivors of IPV. The third step of Schreier's analysis process consisted of building a coding frame. Schreier (2014) stated that coding frames are built on main categories in which, "Main categories are those aspects of the material about which the researcher would like more information, and subcategories specify what is said in the material with respect to these main categories" (p. 175). In this analysis, the TMC, SET, and internal and external factors found in the literature consisted of the main categories of analysis and then the participant's own wording and phrasing

contributed to the data-driven subthemes presented.

The fourth step of Schreier's content analysis process consisted of segmentation. The researcher completed segmentation by dividing up the data and looking for thematic criteria that was consistent with the theoretical frameworks. The next step, trial coding, consisted of two independent coders looking at the data and coding for the main themes to determine reliability. After that, the analysis process called for an evaluation and modification of the coding frame to determine inconsistencies. Schreier (2014) stated, "Coding consistency, that is applying categories to the entire material in a consistent manner, is an important quality criterion in qualitative content analysis" (p. 178). Within the evaluation and modification stage of analysis, the researcher also considered the validity, or how well the themes selected adequately describe the concepts of the theoretical frameworks utilized, of the themes and subthemes (Schreier, 2014). The next step consisted of conducting the main analysis, which tied together both the concept-driven themes and subthemes as well the data-driven information from the participants of the study. Finally, the results and discussion chapters of this study will incorporate the final presentation and interpretation of the findings.

TMC directed content analysis. The researcher used the main stages of TMC in order to organize the semi-structured interview questions – precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. For example, one of the interview questions asked of the participants was, "Can you tell me about when things started to shift towards being violent?" This question helped the research to understand when the participant's perception of violence shifted and she likely went from the precontemplation stage of leaving the relationships to contemplating leaving. Additionally, the researcher asked about the last incident of abuse. This last incident was during the action stage when the participant left the abusive relationship and went to the

emergency shelter. The researcher used directed content analysis to examine those questions specifically and imposed the TMC process onto the participant's responses.

SET directed content analysis. Similarly, the researcher used two of the main concepts of SET, power and costs/benefits, to directly analyze the participant responses. The participants may not have used the terminology of "power" or "costs/benefits," however the research utilized directed content analysis to impose the theoretical framework on the participant's responses. The researcher used concept-driven themes from the SET framework and incorporated the data-driven codes as subthemes in the analysis (Chan et al., 2012). For example, one of the questions asked in the interview pertained to specific acts of violence and what would happen. This was designed to have the participants talk about the types of abuse they experienced, as well as the power that the abuser exerts over them. Subthemes that the participants discussed included ways the abuser controlled the participant, threatened the participant, psychologically abused the participant, and isolated the participant from others – all of which are examples of the abuser exerting power over the survivor.

Internal and external factors and directed content analysis. All of the internal and external factors that were found in the review of the literature were used as themes imposed on the data. The researcher used those themes and imposed them onto the participant's interviews to discover consistencies and discrepancies between the participants' experiences and the internal and external factors found in the literature. The internal factors consisted of mental health, including depressive symptoms, empowerment, and assertiveness, commitment to the relationship, as well as a survivor's spirituality or belief in God. External factors, or those factors that are outside of the survivor's direct control, included: the children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse, informal and formal support networks, offender characteristics, and socioeconomic

factors. These were the primary themes and the researcher imposed these themes onto the data and then elicited further subthemes.

Strengths and weaknesses of directed content analysis. Directed, or qualitative, content analysis is a very specific form of content analysis that differs from the typical quantitative approach. In both quantitative and qualitative (directed) content analysis, the researcher uses a predetermined set of codes or concepts to analyze within a data set (Morgan, 1993). The strength of qualitative, or directed, content analysis is that it incorporates both a quantitative aspect (in counting the number of patterns or themes found) as well as interpreting the results based on pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

De Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon, and Denier (2012) argue that there are several weaknesses associated with content analysis, which includes the "over-reliance of qualitative software packages," "word overload due to line-by-line approaches," "difficulty of retaining the integrity of each respondent's story," and that the "full potential of the data is not exploited" (p. 362). Additionally, the researchers found that trustworthiness is often compromised with qualitative content analysis. A guided methodological approach increases the trustworthiness and credibility (De Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012).

Participants

Survivors of IPV who live in an emergency domestic violence shelter or in transitional housing were asked to participate in in-depth interviews and a short demographics survey. Participants included female survivors of IPV who had experienced violence within the past two years. For the purpose of this study, broad definitions of IPV and abuse were used. IPV could encompass physical, psychological or emotional, financial or economic, verbal, intimidation, coercion and threats, or sexual lived experiences. Furthermore, abuse could include assault,

beating, physical injury, stalking, harassment, or forceful controlling behavior that seeks to exert power and control over another. Survivors living in transitional housing or formerly in transitional housing, emergency shelter, and who were over 18 years of age were asked to participate. For this study an emergency shelter consisted of a facility in which the primary purpose was to provide temporary, confidential housing for survivors of IPV and their children. Emergency shelters typically allow survivors and their children to reside there at the facility for anywhere from 30-60 days depending on the agency (Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009; Long, 2015). Transitional housing, on the other hand, is designed to be longer term (anywhere from 12-24 months) in order to assist the residents with transitioning back into society as self-sufficient individuals (Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009; Long, 2015). The transitional housing programs in this study was comprised of survivors of IPV and their children with the goal of helping them to become independent and self-sufficient and live a life free from violence. Participants who, at the time of the study, lived in an emergency shelter or the transitional housing program, who had left abusive relationships were invited to participate in the study, and those individuals who were currently in an abusive relationship were not included in the study. The exclusion of participants in an abusive relationship is necessary because they would still be experiencing the abuse from an abusive partner. Moustakas (1994) noted that fundamental measures for selecting participants to participate in a qualitative research study included participants who have experienced the phenomenon, are interested in participating, and consent to the interview and the publishing of the collected data. Subjects were recruited through two local domestic violence agencies in the southwest region. Flyers were posted inviting participants with a telephone contact number that participants could call to schedule an interview (see Appendix E). Additionally, an email was generated to the director of client services at the agency asking for their assistance with

recruiting women who might be willing to participate. After speaking with the director of client services at each of the agencies, the researcher then contacted the emergency shelter and transitional housing case managers at each of the locations and asked for their assistance in the recruitment process encouraging participants to schedule an interview if they were interested.

For the safety of the participants, the interviews were conducted at the domestic violence agency. Participants were given a $20 Wal-Mart gift card after completion of the interview as a gesture of appreciation for their time and effort in taking part in this study. Participants had the option to choose to quit or decline to answer any questions with no consequence/effect to compensation. Purposeful snowball sampling methods were utilized for this study in order to obtain a satisfactory number of participants. According to Patton (2002) and Creswell (2009), within qualitative research, there are no definitive sample size rules; rather, the emphasis is on saturation. The research process continued until the data reached saturation. Saturation is the point at which there is redundancy in the data, or no new information on the phenomenon is being produced (Creswell, 2013; Munhall, 2012). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) defined saturation as the "point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data," and "coding is no longer productive to the analysis process" (p. 59). Leininger (1994) described saturation as being when an exhaustive explanation, with no further enlightenment is reached. In qualitative research, a researcher's choice of sample size should be determined based on by his/her goals for the research project, which denotes that the data collection and analysis process should continue until data saturation is reached (Hays & Singh, 2012). Mason (2010) described the importance of the size of qualitative samples by stating they "must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous" (p. 2). This study

reached saturation because no new themes or subthemes were discovered during the last two interviews conducted with participants.

Procedure

The participants had the option to be interviewed at the domestic violence agency in which they are housed or at the agency's outreach center. Semi-structured, audiotaped interviews were utilized to obtain firsthand accounts and narratives of the lived experience from the survivors of IPV through face-to-face interviews. The goal of interviewing survivors of IPV who have left an abusive relationship was to listen to their stories and recollections of their experiences rather than attempt to control the discussion. The interviews lasted approximately one-hour. The principal investigator interviewed all of the participants.

Each participant was asked to verbally agree to a consent form prior to the start of each interview. Survivors were verbally read the consent form and asked give their verbal consent in place of written consent to participate in order to maintain anonymity of the participants. Participants were informed verbally and in writing that they can discontinue participation at any time. Additionally, all interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed with all identifying information redacted so that only the researcher can identify the individual subjects from the transcript, which maintained their confidentiality. Thus, all transcripts resulting from the interviews were anonymous and confidential. Participants were provided a copy of the consent form for their personal records. Each participant was given an ID, and only the researcher had the key between the participant names and the ID. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and then the transcriptions were entered into NVivo software, Version 22.

Human subject protection. The information collected did not contain any personal or sensitive information that will place participants at legal risk. As required by law, if any

participants reveals incidents of child abuse, the researcher was required to report this information to Child Protective Services. The research participants were informed of this at the start of the interview process, and it was part of the informed consent documentation. The research was approved by the University of Texas at Arlington Institiotional Review Board, protocol number 2016-0846. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix D.

The interviews were recorded with a digital recording device. All participation was entirely voluntary, and information was kept strictly confidential. All consent forms, digital audio, and the resulting transcripts was stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in the UTA School of Social Work. All electronic files related to this study were stored on an encrypted, password-protected computer. The demographics survey did not ask for any identifying information and the data collected in this survey cannot not be linked back to any one individual.

Due to the sensitive nature of IPV, confidentiality and the security of the participants' information was essential within the context of the study. Folders were prepared for each participant containing informed consent and confidentiality agreements. All of the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the right to privacy, confidentiality procedures, and the right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. No names were used during the interview process, and the audio recordings were transcribed by a transcription service and then destroyed after completion. If the participants experienced any form of discomfort or anxiety during the interview process, they had the option to conclude the interview immediately, and the participants were provided with the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, as well as several other local agencies.

Instruments. Study instruments included a twenty-one item written demographics survey and an interview guide. The demographics survey (see Appendix B) asked the participant questions pertaining to their preferred sex, race, religion, languages spoken in their home, and age. In addition, the survey included questions pertaining to the highest level of education they received, their relationship status, and the number of times (if any) they had been married. In order to ascertain a better picture of their socioeconomic status, the researcher also asked the survivors questions pertaining to whether or not they had health insurance, their income (without their partner's income), their employment status, and whether or not they had access to reliable transportation. The demographics questionnaire then asked the survivors questions about their children – particularly the number of children they had, their ages, and whether or not the children were with them. In order to get a better picture of the length of time the survivors had been separated from the abusive partner, the demographics questions then asked about where "home" was in the past 30 days, six months, and one year. Finally, the survey concluded with a question about their mental and physical health condition as well as whether or not they are U.S. citizens. The demographics survey took most participants less than 10 minutes to complete. The purpose of the demographics survey was to describe the sample in order to better understand the results.

Qualitative Questions. A semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed for flexibility in the interview process. Throughout the interview, the researcher utilized probing techniques, or follow-up questions that "can stimulate the participant to expand upon the original comment, to gather more information from the survivor about a particular topic" (Yin, 2015, p. 136). The researcher began the interview with a broad question about the participant's background in order to build rapport with the survivor. The researcher used

clarifying questions and probing to gain a deeper insight into the participant's background growing up. The qualitative questions guided the researcher in a discussion with the participant about her experiences with leaving an abusive relationship (see Appendix C).

The researcher probed for information about family dynamics and experiences of abuse. After developing rapport with the participant with some initial introductory questions, the researcher then transitioned and asked the participant to talk about their history with abusive relationships and then how they would characterize their most recent relationship. The researcher questioned the survivor about how they and their partner met, whether or not they were married, and if they had children together. After inquiring about the beginning of the relationship, the researcher then asked the survivor when they recalled their relationship shifted towards what they perceived as violence. A follow-up probing question was then asked as to if there was a specific event that caused the shift whereby they realized their relationship was or had changed. More questions were then asked by the research to delve into any instances/events that might have happened to lead up to the abuse.

After learning more about the circumstances that would lead to the abuse, the interview then evolved into talking about the last incident of abuse that the participant experienced. This question is where a good percentage of time was spent inquiring about as it was the triggering episode for the survivor to make the decision to leave the relationship. The researcher asked about what was the turning point that began the abusive actions, whether or not children were home, if the survivor had a plan to leave, whether or not they had left the relationship before, how they decided where to go, and what made that abusive incident different than other times in the past. After exploring the survivor's decision-making thought-process, the researcher then asked the participants whether or not they had any communication with the abuser since they had

left and if so, what that entailed. The researcher also questioned the participants about what keeps them from going back to that relationship. In order to ascertain what levels of support the survivors experienced, the researcher asked the participant about what helped them to be able to leave, what family/friends do they have in the area, what their relationship was like with them, and how did their family/friends respond to the survivor telling them about the abuse.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

This phenomenological research study was designed to gain a deeper and clearer

understanding of a survivor's lived experiences of leaving an abusive relationship. This chapter

reports the results of the in-depth, qualitative interviews with the survivors of IPV. The results

begin with an introduction to the participants who were interviewed and their demographics (see

Table 1). The results of this data are provided in four different sections that correspond with each

of the research questions. The data pertaining to the first research question utilizes an interpretive

phenomenological approach, whereas the results for the second, third, and fourth research

questions are presented from a directed content analysis approach.

Participant Demographics

All of the participants interviewed for this study were women who had left an abusive

relationship and were currently living in either transitional housing or an emergency shelter.

Twelve of the participants were in the emergency shelter and seven participants were in

transitional housing. The age of the participants ranged from 24 to 58 years of age, with an

average age of 37.6 years. Two women self-identified as Latino/Hispanic, four self-identified as

Caucasian, eight self-identified as African American/Black, and five participants indicated that

they were of mixed races. The participants had an average of between 2 and 3 children ranging

from nine months old to 36 years old. The average age of the children was 13 years old. The

majority (68.4%) of the women indicated that they were currently single. Two participants

reported that they were in an intimate relationship (not married); two stated that they were

divorced; one participant indicated that she was legally married, and another participant stated

that she was separated. Eight of the participants indicated that they had some college/trade

training; six of the women reported that they had a high school diploma or GED; four of the women stated that they had less than a high school diploma; and one participant indicated that she had a post graduate level of education. Eight of the participants (42.1%) stated that they were not currently employed but were looking for work. Twenty-six percent of the women (*n*=5) stated that they were employed full time. Three of the participants were employed on a part-time basis; one participant stated that she was a homemaker, one was retired, and one was unable to work. Table 1 depicts a further breakdown of the demographics.

Table 1. *Demographics*

Characteristics	*n* = 19	%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	8	42.1
Mixed Race	5	26.3
Caucasian (not Hispanic)	4	21.1
Latina/Hispanic	2	10.5
Relationship Status		
Single	13	68.4
Intimate partner (not married)	2	10.5
Divorced	2	10.5
Legally married	1	5.3
Separated	1	5.3
Employment		
Out of work and looking for work	8	42.1
Employed, full-time	5	26.3
Employed, part-time	3	15.8
A homemaker	1	5.3
Retired	1	5.3
Unable to work	1	5.3
Education		
Some College/Trade	8	42.1
High School/GED	6	31.6
Less than High School	4	21.1
Post Graduate	1	5.3
Number of Children		
Two	7	36.8
One	5	26.3
Three	5	26.3
Five	2	10.5

Results for Research Question 1: What are the Experiences of Leaving an Abusive

Relationship for Survivors in an Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing?

The interpretive phenomenological process involves understanding the phenomenon in

the context of the participant's worldview, which includes their thoughts, feelings, perceptions,

ideas, and senses (Munhall, 2012). This phenomenological approach was selected not only to

describe the survivor's experiences but also to better understand the meaning of their lived

experiences within the context of their lives (Creswell et al., 2007). The researcher created

themes and subthemes based on the participant responses. The subthemes for research question

one were then organized based on number of responses. The results will be discussed based on

these themes and subthemes, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Phenomenological Themes*

Theme	*n*=19	%
Themes of Violence		
Childhood Experiences	16	84.2
History of Abusive Relationships	13	68.4
Abuser's Drug/Alcohol Involvement	10	52.6
Themes of Resilience		
Belief in God	11	57.9
Family, Friends, and/or Church Offered Support	8	42.1
Themes of Leaving		
Left Because of Children	11	57.9
Family, Friends, and/or Church Helped Them Leave	9	47.4
Tiredness as a Threshold for Leaving	8	42.1
Left Because They Believed They Would be Killed	5	26.3

Themes of violence. Childhood experiences of violence, history of abusive relationships,

and the abuser's drug/alcohol abuse were all predictive of violence in the intimate relationship.

Childhood experiences of violence included both experiencing physical and/or sexual violence as

well as witnessing violence between adults. Having a history of abusive relationships was also

found to be a theme for violence in future relationships. Several of the women interviewed

indicated that they experienced violence in previous intimate relationships as well. There also

appeared to be a strong relationship between an abuser's drug/alcohol use and violence in the relationship. The following three subthemes are suggestive of patterns of violence in intimate relationships.

 Childhood experiences of violence. Sixteen of the nineteen participants indicated that they experienced abuse as a child, which included physical and/or sexual abuse as well as witnessing inter-parental violence. Several participants discussed the abuse they endured growing up at the hands of either a parent or close family member. Two of the participants recalled instances of being physically abused by their father and stated, "He took his anger of my mom out on me because I was the only person that was there" and "I recall one instance when he hurt me so bad, I had to miss school for a week." Other participants reported sexual abuse by male figures at a young age stating:

 At the age of nine I was molested by a cousin on my mom's side. Then when I was ten, I was molested on my dad's side, by a male cousin. Male cousins on both sides. Never really got help for it, so it kind of made me a sexual person, growing up.

 Some of the participants had also witnessed abuse between parents throughout their life. One of the participants recounted a story of watching abuse between her parents growing up, which shaped the way that they viewed future relationships. Several participants expressed that they learned that violence was a form of love. One participant stated the following:

 My mother liked to go out and go to clubs and stuff like that, and my father didn't, and he didn't like it and so he would fight, he would hit her so I began to think that was a form of love. That if a man loved you, he would hit you.

 Still other participants indicated that they had a rough childhood growing up, excluding examples of physical and sexual violence. One participant, whose mother was a widow and

responsible for raising eleven children stated, "We didn't have enough money, and it was really tough. Once we started growing, my brothers started looking for a job, and trying to help a little bit, but anyway, we never have enough." Another woman who was interviewed indicated that her basic needs were met, but that her parents really struggled to provide anything above and beyond their most basic needs. Other participants described their childhood experiences as having a lack of love or affection in the household:

> My childhood was I would say volatile. I didn't live with my mom and dad. I lived with my mom. I just remember a lot of division, dissension as a kid, being tossed here and there.

History of abusive relationships. Several of the participants (n=13) indicated that they had a history of abusive relationships. This was a significant topic of discussion with the participants. When asked about their history of abusive relationships, many of the participants would recount stories from previous abusive relationships. Additionally, many of the women stated that they had been married multiple times to abusive men, particularly at a young age. One woman stated:

> I've been married once, that was my first abusive relationship. I was married right at 18, right after we graduated high school. We went to school together, we have a 5 year old together. Right now, we are legally separated; we've by separated for four years now.

One participant stated, "I've been in five relationships total and four of them were abusive." Other participants indicated that there had always been some type of violence in her relationships and that they have had multiple abusive relationships.

Abuser's drugs/alcohol use. Ten of the participants interviewed indicated that the abuser's drug/alcohol use was often a precursor for the violence. Several of the participants

attributed the violence to the abuser's alcohol use saying, "Most of the time it would be when he was drunk, because he's an alcoholic." One of the participants described the volatility the drinking had on the abuser's personality by saying:

> In the last few months if he was drinking whiskey, whiskey was evil for him. If he was drinking whiskey and he would get drunk, he would take his gun and he would go out in the front yard and shoot it off.

The participants recognized the impact that drugs/alcohol played on not only the lives of the abusive partner but also how they impacted the abusive partner's behavior towards them. One participant stated, "When he started drinking, it was an absolutely unrecognizable person, from Friday to Sunday. He'd try to sober up and go to work." The abuser's drugs/alcohol use created a volatile environment for the women, which often led to explosive incidents of violence.

Themes of resilience. The participants indicated several factors that helped them to overcome the abuse, specifically a belief in God and external supports such as family, friends, and church members offered support. Participants identified these influences as a way that they were not only able to cope with the abuse but also an avenue for being able to escape the abuse. Participants indicated that a belief in God helped them to be able to internally cope with the violence that they were experiencing. Likewise, the women interviewed indicated that having informal supports such as family, friends, and church members helped them to maintain a sense of empowerment and support during difficult times.

Belief in God. Eleven participants stated that a belief in God helped them to cope with and overcome the abuse. One woman described the crucial role her faith has in her life and how her faith helps her get out of bed in the mornings. Still other participants described how their faith in God helps them through the hard times. One participant described her statement of faith

as follows:

> Obviously, I know it was God because I believe in God deeply. I thank God, never stop
>
> going to church because he wanted me to. I never stopped praying because he wanted me
>
> to. Talking about oh, you have to go to your low down church. They don't even help
>
> when you ask them for help. I'd be like, that's not true, yes they do. They do help; they
>
> just probably won't help because they see who I'm living with. They knew that this
>
> person is not doing you right and not good for you.

Still other women believe in the higher power of God and the belief that God can help the

overcome difficult situations if they have faith. One woman talked about how God will always

be there to help her get through. She stated:

> God don't put us ... God might put us in certain situations, but it's up to us to deal with it
>
> and make it better, and I didn't do the right things… Everything's okay. I believe in God
>
> and I know God got me through it all. He told me, so I'm good.

Their belief in God not only helped them to cope with the abuse, but also gave them hope for

whatever the future holds. The participants' beliefs in God helped them to be resilient during a

challenging time in their life.

Family, friends, and/or church offered support. Another important consideration for a

survivor's resilience is their level of external support that they received from family members,

friends, and church members. Eight of the participants talked about some level of support from

family, friends, or church congregants. For one woman, her mother played a vital role in helping

her to cope with the abuse that she experienced. She stated:

> She [survivor's mother] really understood maybe because she went through the same
>
> thing. She really understood and she really was a big support.

Another participant talked extensively about how her church has played an active role in her life and how she has made many friends through the church. She had developed secret friendships with church members, even calling them "sister friends." The friendships were secret from the abusive partner. She went on to talk about the important role that they had in helping her to stay strong. The participant stated that they would say to her "We're here. We love you" during challenging times with her abusive partner.

Themes of leaving. There are four subthemes that emerged under the main theme of leaving – family, friends, and church helped them leave, left because of children, tiredness as a threshold, and left because they believed they would be killed. When asked about what triggered them to leave the abusive relationship, many of the participants talked about their children and the important role that they played in that decision-making process. Many of the women interviewed also talked about how there were external supports in place to help them to be able to leave, which suggests supports are also an predator of leaving an abusive relationship. Not only did they think about their children and supports, the participants also indicated tiredness of the situation. Many of the women had been in an abusive relationship several times in the past and the weariness, fatigue, and tiredness of the cyclical nature of abuse triggered their decision to leave. Finally, several participants indicated that the dangerousness of the abusive incidents had reached a level that they believed they would be killed, which suggests that the unpredictable and powerful acts of abuse are also suggestive of pattern for leaving an abusive relationship.

Left because of children. Eleven participants indicated that they left the abusive relationship, at least in part, due to the impact on the children. When asked about what triggered them to leave the abusive relationship, many of the women discussed their children. One woman described how she hoped that leaving the abusive relationship would help show her children

right from wrong, teach her son how to treat women, and said, "I can't let my daughter grow up like this." One woman in particular identified the generational pattern of abuse being passed down to children and indicated that this helped them to leave:

> I look at it as a pattern, but I could be wrong because I see it as a pattern because my mom went through it, I went through it. But I refuse to let my child go through it and if they're going through it, I think they should look at it as a pattern as well. They're going through it, most likely their kids will go through it if they don't stop the pattern now. Someone has to the have the courage to stop it right then and there because if not, their kids will go through it, even if it's their son, their daughters, or whoever, it'll affect them all. Not just the girls, the sons too. It'll affect them the worst. They're the one who reenact the worst situations because they're looking at their daddy hitting on their mom so they feel like that's what they should do and that's not right. They get affected it by the worst too. It's not just the girls.

Another participant also recognized the impact that growing up in an abusive household would have on the children saying, "That was when I really started thinking about things, and the affect that it was having on my kids and knowing I needed to do something." This suggests that when the participants realized and acknowledged the abuse influenced their children in a negative way, this prompted them to leave the relationship.

> ***Family, friends, and/or church members helped them leave.*** Family, friends, and church members not only helped women to cope with the violence, they also proved to be a noteworthy factor in determining whether a participant left an abusive relationship or not. Nine of the participants discussed how family, friends, and/or church members helped them to be able to leave. Numerous women shared the impactful role that their faith community played in helping

them to leave and cope with the abuse – insisting that they not return home to the abusive husband. Another participants described the meaningful role that her family members played to help her to be able leave:

>What saved me then, he went to work and my whole family came while he was at work. There were still pictures all over the wall. I hadn't packed a thing. All my friends and my family came. A moving truck came. Throw it in a box and get it on the truck. We did that and my dad has rent houses. He had a house right next door to him, so I felt safe. My dad is right next-door. They know my dad. They're not crazy. They're not going to come there. That's what made me feel safe on that note.

Tiredness as a threshold for leaving. Many of the women (*n*=8) indicated that being tired of the situation was a trigger for them leaving the abusive relationship. Several women talked about reaching this threshold where they could not longer endure the abuse, which suggests that tiredness of the situation is a pattern for leaving the relationship. One participant described tiredness as a threshold of leaving as follows:

>I just got tired. I didn't want to tell nobody. Because I know when I talk about it I don't do it. So I wanted to be about it. I didn't want to tell nobody, I just got tired. My body was tired. My soul was tired. It got so bad to where it was a time I didn't even want to get up in the morning and just sleep all day. Get up and take the kids to school and just sleep the rest of the day away. That was terrible. I didn't want to fix nothing - my kids; steady going with nothing, no food; he was spending my money; he was stealing my money. I'm just tired. I got him saying' he gonna take me out or I'm gonna take him out. At that point and time somebody had to go and I didn't plan on it being me, so I had to remove myself from the situation.

One woman recounted having flashbacks to previous abusive relationships and she stated that she was tired of continuing to experience abuse and needed to leave. Another participant indicated that she experienced abuse from her first husband and stated, "I was just exhausted. I was tired. I said no more. I don't want to put up with this no more."

     Left because they believed they would be killed. Five of the participants interviewed for this study indicated that they left the abusive relationship due to the fact that they believed they would have otherwise been killed. One woman detailed an account when the abuser pulled a gun on her and how that incident woke her up and she decided to leave.

> He had never said he would kill me before. I think that was my wake up call. I thought, if this guy kills me, what will happen to my kids? Who will take care of them? I couldn't imagine anybody else. That was my wake up to get up and move.

The participants indicated that the violence had become so extreme that they believed they would be killed. After a near-death experience, one participant described the following:

> The night I did leave I think I saw my life flash before my eyes, and I knew if I didn't go then that I was probably never going to make it out so I up and left…. It was the fact that I really believed that if his friend had not shown up, I really believed I would've been dead. I cannot explain it, the way he had me pinned against that wall with his hands on my neck, and the look in his face, I just knew that he was going to kill me. I don't have any other explanation for that.

The constant fear and belief that they would have been killed or will be killed in a future incident was often a turning point for the women interviewed. Because they believed they would be killed, they left the abusive relationship, which suggests the near-death experiences are patterns of leaving.

Research Question 2: What Impact, if any, do the Stages of the Transtheoretical Model of Change Play in Influencing a Woman's Decision to Leave an Abusive Relationship?

In order to examine the second research question, the researcher developed the semi-structured interview questions for the participants in order of the transtheoretical model of change (TMC) and the stages that they might experience in the leaving process. The interview was formatted in such a way that it moved through the stages of change with subsequent questions. By looking at the results from a TMC perspective, the results have been broken into different themes based on the TMC within Table 3. Aligned with directed content analysis, the researcher specifically developed predetermined codes based on the participant's movement from one stage of change to another. The researcher asked a question after the initial shift in their relationship, which is representative of movement from pre-contemplation to contemplating a change in the relationship. Consistent with previous research (Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell, and O'Campo, 2004; Catallo, Jack, Ciliska, and MacMillan, 2012) survivors of IPV may experience overlap between the contemplation and preparation stages of the TMC due to needing to escape the abusive relationship quickly, which is why the shift from contemplation and preparation stages were combined into one predetermined code. The bulk of the interview with the participants focused on the leaving process, or when they decided to take action, which was why taking action was also selected as a predetermined code. Finally, the researcher also asked the participants questions about how they have maintained their change. The maintenance stage made up the last predetermined code.

Table 3. *TMC Themes*

Transtheoretical Model of Change	n=19	%
Movement from Pre-contemplation to Contemplation		
Moving in together	8	42.1
Pregnancy	5	26.3
Contemplation and Preparation Stages		

No Plan to Leave	8	42.1
Plan to Leave	4	21.1
Action Stage		
What Made that Time Different	17	89.5
Left Because of Children	11	57.9
Believed They Would be Killed	5	26.3
External Social Supports	13	68.4
Maintenance Stage		
What Keeps Them from Going Back	15	78.9
Communication After Incident	13	68.4
No Communication with Abuser	9	47.4
Yes They Have Communicated	4	21.1

Movement from pre-contemplation to contemplation. After some introductory discussion and beginning questions with the participant, the first question the researcher asked pertaining to the TMC was "Can you tell me about when things started to shift towards being violent?" All of the participants had a very clear idea of an exact point in time when there was a definitive shift in their relationship with the abuser from nonviolence to violence. After this first incident of violence, many of the women first contemplated leaving the relationship. This theme can be further broken into the following two subthemes: moving in together and pregnancy.

Moving in together. Eight of the participants stated that moving in together was a turning point in their relationship when they noticed the violence either for the first time or the violence escalated significantly. One participant described this stage as follows:

It's like things shifted, changed when I went ahead and agreed to it. Okay, I'll just move in for a little while. It's like I didn't have a life anymore. That's what I felt like. I was trapped is what I felt. To me, that's the worst feeling to feel. You feel trapped, that's the worst feeling, like what do I do?

Other participants of the study identified that living together was a turning point as well. One of the women stated, "Once we started living together he had no choice but to let me see that side of him." Similarly, another participant recognized the change in their partner's behavior when they

started living together saying, "That's why I said from now on I will have my own place in my own name, because most abusers are control freaks. They change immediately and I did notice that when I agreed to move in." This turning point in their relationship consisted of a shift from no violence previously to various forms of violence after moving in together. This change in behavior caused the participants to rethink their relationship and contemplated leaving their partner.

Pregnancy. Similarly, some women (*n*=5) indicated that the shift in the relationship occurred when they became pregnant. One of the participants described the increased severity after finding out she was pregnant. Another woman discussed the increase in severity after the first child and then after the second one, she stated, "it just went crazy." Yet another participant described the shift in abuse as follows:

> I guess it was when I got pregnant… I don't know. It was just like I guess his attitude towards me was like something changed. It's like he would act different but then he would burst out or he would apologize and act like he doesn't want to be like that. He would know that he's changed but he really didn't I guess know how to control it.

Contemplation and preparation stages. The contemplation stage of TMC is when the individual realizes that a change needs to be made. The question asked in the qualitative interviews that addressed this stage was, "Did you have a plan to leave?" For many women, the contemplation and the preparation stages overlap. Eight of the women interviewed indicated that they did not have time to prepare or develop a plan to leave the abusive relationship. For one woman, the preparation stage involved throwing whatever clothes would fit into a laundry basket as fast as she could and leaving. Several women described instances where there was just a moment of clarity, and they packed up and left. One participant stated that she had to lie to the

abuser and she stated that she wasn't feeling good. She then quickly took action when he left to use the restroom. She stated, "When he went in the bathroom - that was my cue. I was like, 'I got to go.'" Another woman talked about her last minute decision to leave without any preparation or planning:

> It was a very last minute thing; it wasn't like I'd been planning it. I had all these things already pulled together, or somewhere where I knew, "Okay, just go grab." No, I was literally trying to think off the top of my head, "Okay God, what else do I need?" It was very sporadic and spur of the moment.

The participants had little-to-no time to prepare to leave with instantaneous decisions to leave and take action after an abusive incident.

Action. Taking overt actions to make a change is the next stage in the TMC model. For these women, leaving the abusive relationship was the action taken. In the action stage, the women have moved past deliberating whether to leave or not and have decided to take action and leave. Within the action stage, women discussed several different aspects of the leaving process. The action theme is broken into several subthemes: what made that time different, external support help, and keys to leaving.

What made that time different. Participants regularly talked about two different reasons that made that last incident of abuse different than previous ones and are the reasons that triggered them to leave – the children and because they believed they would be killed. Eleven of the participants discussed the impact the abuse had on the children as being a trigger for taking action to leave the relationship. Several of the participants stated that they could identify the pattern in the relationship and did not want a generational cycle of abuse to be passed down to their children. One example included:

It's a cycle that I know that I would have to break because I don't want my daughter to grow up, to think that it's okay for a man to beat on her. I just put in my head, it's time to go. It got completely out of hand.

Participants' recognition of the negative actions of their abusive partner and the impact that the actions had on their children played a role in what made that time different. One participant stated that if she did not take a stand and show her son that the abuser's behavior was wrong, she believed that her son would grow up thinking it was ok to treat girls and women abusively. Other participants indicated that something happened involving the children that triggered them to decide to take action to leave the abusive relationship. One woman described how the abuser spit in her son's face and her reaction was to immediately leave as soon as something happened to her child. Another woman stated that the abuser hit her two-year-old daughter, which was the turning point.

Another major theme that made that last incident of abuse different was that the participants believed they would have been killed if they had not escaped. Five of the women explained the traumatic effect the last incident had on them and their belief that they would not live. One participant stated, "He had never said he would kill me before. I think that was my wake up call." Another woman who was interviewed recounted her life flashing before her eyes during the violence incident. She stated:

The night I did leave I think I saw my life flash before my eyes, and I knew if I didn't go then that I was probably never going to make it out so I up and left… It was the fact that I really believed that if his friend had not shown up, I really believed I would've been dead. I cannot explain it, the way he had me pinned against that wall with his hands on my

neck, and the look in his face, I just knew that he was going to kill me. I don't have any

other explanation for that.

Another woman told a story of her aunt who told her about a dream she had in which the

participant was lying dead in a casket as a result of the abuse. That dream opened her eyes and

she packed up her things and left that day.

External social supports. Additionally, social supports also assisted many women in

being able to take action and leave an abusive relationship. Several women describe an

individual or group of individuals who helped her to be able to leave the abuse at a particularly

critical time. Examples of church supports who helped participants leave include:

The lady in my Sunday school class said, "You're not going home. You're staying in my

guest room and we're taking you to a shelter."

Another participant recounted the support she received from her Sunday school leader from

church and how the Sunday school leader would not let her continue to live in her car with her

children. The participant stated:

Once my small group bible study leader found out that that's where I was staying, she

was like, "No. This is not acceptable." She called the church and told them what was

going on. No one had called me to set up a meeting for us to meet and talk about what's

going on. That's why I stayed there.

Another survivor reported that she turned to social media for help. She posted something

about needing help on Facebook and someone called the police for her and directed them to her

house. Others reached out to help her as well:

I got on Facebook and said, can someone please come get me, my boyfriend is hitting

me. Right away, everything just blew up. My home girl messaged me on Facebook, if

you need a ride, I can come get you and take you back home.

Maintenance. Because some the participants interviewed had just left an abusive

relationship, the question of maintenance, or maintaining the decision to leave the abusive

relationship, is difficult to assess long-term, however the women who were in a long-term

transitional housing program were able to provide important insight. One question that was asked

of the women pertaining to maintenance was "What keeps you from going back?" (to the

relationship). I also asked about what kind of communication they had with the abuser since

leaving. Both of those questions helped to provide an understanding into the maintenance

component of the TMC and how well they had maintained leaving the relationship.

What keeps them from going back. Children were a top reason that participants do not

return to their abusive partners. Several of the women described how their children are of upmost

importance and that they come first in their minds. When asked about what keeps them from

going back to the abusive relationship, several women also talked about God and their faith; still

others talked about not going back for their own self-respect and desire for independence. One

participant stated, "I think it's just I want to become independent, not feeling like I'm leaning on

or, what am I trying to say? [Not wanting to] Rely on a man." Another participant stated:

What keeps me from going back is that I know that I deserve someone that can love me

without all the volatile strings attached…I know that I'm a loving person. I know that I

deserve to be in a healthy relationship. I've had healthy relationships before. Just getting

older. My children are older. I want to be in a loving relationship and I just think that I

deserve that.

One participant viewed leaving the relationship as an opportunity to start over and in order to do that she needed to stay away from the abuser. She stated, "I have a place where I can start over. Well, they helping me with some goals that I have to be independent and not be dependent on nobody." Women, who had the social supports in their life to be able to assist with the maintenance stage, stated that the supports were important to them and a reason why they might not return to the abuse. One woman told a story about how her father got in contact with her after she left and told her how proud of her he was. Another participant talked about how her grandmother played an important role by praying with her in times of weakness when she would be tempted to return to the abuser.

Communication with abuser after incident. About half of the participants explained that no communication with the abuser after the incident is a key component of maintaining the leaving stage. Many women stated that they changed their phone numbers and blocked his number, changed their emails and blocked his emails, and blocked him on Facebook. One woman described the lengths she went to in order to cease communication with him entirely:

> By the third day, I just went up to the phone store, changed my handset, changed my number, changed my email. Blocked my email. Fortunately for me, he was never my friend on Facebook, which is another story. I just made sure I cut off all communication. All our friends, I stopped talking to everybody. I cut off all communication because the last thing was he sent to me, that I saw. I was already like, I didn't know how I felt so I just decided, you know what, I'm not going back. This is it. I can't.

Still, other women maintain communication with him after leaving. Many of the participants described having to maintain the communication as a result of having children with the abuser and allowing him access to the children.

Research Question 3: How Does Social Exchange Theory's Cost/Benefit Analysis Play a Role in the Decision-Making Process a Survivor Makes when Deciding Whether or Not to Leave an Abusive Relationship?

In order to examine the third research question, the researcher investigated the key constructs of social exchange theory (SET) – particularly the use of power in the relationship as well as the cost/benefit analysis of leaving. Power and cost/benefits of a relationship were used as predetermined codes. The researcher also included concepts the participants described that directly related to power and costs/benefits of the relationship. Concepts that directly related to power that the participants described included: controlling the survivor, threatening the survivor, psychological abuse, and isolating the survivor. Additionally, the costs/benefits of leaving the relationship emerged when the participants discussed the beginning of the relationship and the cycle of abuse the experienced. The researcher used directed content analysis to impose these key constructs on the data in order to gather information in order to answer this research question. Table 4 depicts a breakdown of participant responses within the context of the SET constructs analyzed.

Table 4. *SET Themes*

Social Exchange Theory	*n*=19	%
Use of Power in the Relationship		
Controlling the Survivor	11	57.9
Threatening Survivor	7	36.8
Psychological Abuse	7	36.8
Isolating the Survivor	5	26.3
Costs/Benefits of Leaving the Abusive Relationship		
Beginning of Relationship	10	52.6
Cycle of Abuse	7	36.8

Use of power within the relationship. The participants described several tactics that their abusive partner utilized in order to exert power in the relationship. The use of power is broken into several subthemes to include: controlling survivors, threatening survivors, psychological abuse, and isolating the survivors.

Controlling survivors. Many of the women (*n*=11) described control tactics that limited them significantly in how they went about their day-to-day lives. One woman discussed how the abuser took her car away from her and she could not go anywhere while he would go on drug/alcohol binges for days at a time. Another participant was very intuitive about her abuser's control describing the control issues in such a way:

> Very controlling. That's why it's so scary when you get ready to leave is because when
>
> they lose control, they freak out. When they have to relinquish and they can't tell you
>
> what to do and they can't get in your head and they can't control how you think and how
>
> you feel, they go crazy because they thrive on that control.

Other women talked about not being able to have a life outside of her relationship with her abuser due to his controlling and jealous nature.

Threatening survivor. Several participants (*n*=7) interviewed for this research study also talked about a significant amount of threats that they received by their abusive partner. The threats of violence and threats to kill the survivor or the survivor's family helped the abuser to maintain power over their partner. Several women shared experiences when the abuser threatened to kill them:

> He just stared ranting about how he would hit me. Then, he hit the wall beside me. I said,
>
> "Are you trying to scare me?" (He responded). "I'm not trying to scare you. The next one
>
> is coming for your face. I've told you to go. Just leave. I don't care where you go to. It's

reached a point now. I'm just going to kill you and going to claim insanity. That's it. I'm

just done. I just want you out." And he just went on and on and on.

The abuser would also threaten to harm not only the participant but also the participant's family

and friends if she left. One woman who was interviewed talked about how fearful she was of the

abuser's threats not only to hurt her but also his threats to harm her family. She truly believed he

was capable of following through with the threats. She stated:

It was terrible and I was afraid, because he would always threaten me or threaten to kill

my family, or threaten to do something if I left. Tell me he would find me, or if he

couldn't find me go and blow up my grandmother's house and stuff like ... I didn't know

it's just idle threats, I really believed that he would do that.

Another participant described the power that the abuser had over her. She recounted a time when

he threatened her. She stated that he said if he ever had to go to jail because of the abuse that he

might as well kill her since he was going to jail anyways. The fear of his threats left her

powerless to do anything.

Psychological abuse of survivor. Seven of the participants talked extensively about the

types of psychological abuse that they endured while in the abusive relationship, which helped

the abuser to maintain the power in the relationship over the survivor. Several women described

being called ugly, fat, and stupid repeatedly. Another woman gave a clear example of the type of

psychological abuse she sustained:

Either he didn't like the way I was eating my food, or he didn't like what I cooked, or he

didn't like what I said. He would pass such comments like, "I thought you were smarter

than this. You are stupid." He was forever saying, "You have no sense." It's amazing how

you forget a lot of things… It got to a point that I started believing I wasn't smart at all. I

must be stupid. Something must be wrong with me because that is what I was hearing

everyday.

Isolating the survivor. By keeping the participants away from family, friends, and church,

the abusers were able to isolate them from external supports to maintain power. When one

woman found out that her oldest daughter had just given birth to her grandchild she said,

Instant reaction is get in the car to drive to Austin, but I'm married to this man that I feel

like I'm playing hooky if I get to go to Wal-Mart without him. I feel like I'm under lock

and key and living with a drill sergeant and need a pass.

Still other women described the way that the abuser controlled all of their communication with

friends and family members saying, "I couldn't communicate with anybody because I was at his

mercy" and "He pretty much had cut me off from the friends, and family that I did have. He kind

of pushed everybody out of my life."

Costs/benefits of leaving the abusive relationship. When interviewing participants, the

researcher developed themes based on for the participant's recognition of the abuse and the need

to change. In order to better understand the benefits of the relationship, the researcher asked the

women to talk about what the beginning of their relationship was like with their partner.

Additionally, the researcher discovered that many of the participants talked about the costs of

being in the abusive relationship when they described the cycle of abuse.

Beginning of the relationship. Ten of the participants talked about the wonderful aspects

of the start of the relationship and all of the benefits that the relationship had. A few of the

women talked about how charming and charismatic their partner was at the start of the

relationship saying, "He was like the greatest. All my friends, everybody just loved him, because

he was like the fairy tale guy." Another women talked about how she felt like it was fate that

they met saying: "It's been hearts and flowers. It was absolutely instantaneous. It was never like that with any of my other husbands, so I felt like God brought us together. He wasn't looking. I wasn't looking."

Cycle of abuse. Seven of the participants were able to identify some type of cycle that they recognized within their abusive relationship. The recognition of this cycle seemly helped them to better understand the costs/benefits of being in the relationship. When discussing the cycle of abuse that they experienced, they were able to recognize how the costs and benefits existed cyclically for them. The participants would describe times when the abuser would apologize and be incredibly remorseful for the abuse. One woman stated, "He called me the next day and he was like, 'I'm so sorry. I can't believe I did that. I've never done that before. I'm sorry I overreacted and I'll never be like that again. Please come talk to me.'" A few other women talked about how emotional the abuser was when he was apologizing saying, ""Then he came back and apologized, and he didn't mean to do this, and he didn't mean to do that and crying and trying to make me feel bad" and "He got on his knees and begged me, held me like a little kid would do. He had my legs together, so I wouldn't leave him out the door." For many of the women, the apologies and the promises to change worked for a long time. One woman said, "After that it got much harder to leave because I had my child there and for the most part, most of the time it seemed like everything was okay but it wasn't. I was walking on eggshells all the time" and "He spent three days trying to make everything better so I moved everything back in and that was it." Other women recognized this pattern in their partner and decided not to continue in that abusive relationship. One woman recounted:

> It was, like I said, just back and forth, back and forth, back and forth and then it was just a cycle. I thought that it was going to get worse, because that's how it normally it starts.

The yelling, the name-calling, then it'll go from the name-calling and the being put out to the pushing, and then from there it'll go - to escalate to something else. I was not willing to let it go that far, because I had already been through that.

Another woman talked about how her partner would convince her to come back to the relationship with promise of starting over and getting married. The abusive partner's promises to change are often what lured her back into the relationship – the hope of change and a new life together. She stated:

He said, "When I get out, we can start over, I want to marry you" - he hit me with that line. "I want to marry you and I just want us to have a new life together. No fighting, no cussing, no hitting, none of that"… After that, he kind of sucked me in, again. I was like, "No, I'm not going to do this." I told myself I wouldn't be in an abusive relationship.

When looking at costs and benefits of the relationship, many participants could identify the good aspects of the relationship that were added benefits to their lives; however, several women were also able to recognize the significant costs that came with being in an abusive relationship. One woman stated, "I keep on going back and going back and I feel like I can't go back this time. I love you. I miss you, but can't go back."

Research Question 4: When Deciding to Leave an Abusive Relationship, What Role Do Internal and External Factors Play in that Decision-Making Process?

Based on the information from the literature regarding survivors leaving an abusive relationship, there were several internal and external factors that were found to factor into a survivor's decision to leave. The research utilized these factors and conducted directed content analysis on the data collected in order to determine what factors the survivors discussed or did not discuss. The internal factors found in the literature include: mental health, including

depressive symptoms, empowerment, and assertiveness, commitment to the relationship, as well

as a survivor's spirituality or belief in God. The external factors, or those factors that are outside

of the survivor's direct control, include: the children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse,

informal and formal support networks, offender characteristics, and socioeconomic factors.

Table 5 depicts the breakdown of internal and external factors that were discussed by the

participants in this study.

Table 5. *Internal and External Themes*

Internal and External Factors	n=19	%
Internal Factors		
Mental health/depressive symptoms	5	26.3
Empowerment and assertiveness	11	57.9
Commitment to the relationship	0	0.0
Survivor's spirituality	11	57.9
External Factors		
Children	11	57.9
Patterns of abuse		
Severity	17	89.5
Frequency	0	0.0
Psychological abuse	7	36.8
Survivor's perceived safety	6	31.6
History of abuse		
Family of origin	16	84.2
History of Abusive Relationships	13	68.4
Support		
Informal - family, friends	10	52.6
Formal - counseling, religious, police	5	26.3
Offender characteristics		
Criminal record	0	0.0
Use of weapons	3	15.8
Drugs	10	52.6
Stalking	0	0.0
Socioeconomic factors		
Employment	16	84.2

Internal factors. The internal factors that were found in the literature to play a role in a

participant's decision to leave an abusive relationship included factors that were intrinsic within

the participant. These factors were selected as a part of the review of the literature due to their

prominence and establishment within the IPV literature regarding survivors leaving abusive relationships. Directed content analysis was utilized to explore these factors further with survivors in both emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to determine if they are consistent or if they conflict with previous literature. As part of the directed content analysis, the predetermined internal factor codes that included a participant's mental health, the participant's level of assertiveness and/or empowerment, the participant's level of commitment to the relationship with the abuse, and the participant's spiritual beliefs.

Mental health/depressive symptoms. Five of the participants interviewed talked about the depression that they experienced either while with the abuser and/or currently. The women in the study talked about not being able to do anything or get out of bed. Other participants stated that they lost interest in everything and others simply talked about being treated for depression as a result of the abuse. Consistent with the World Health Organization's definition of depression, the participants of this study expressed that the experienced unhappiness, anxiety, loss of sleep, low self-confidence, or loss of interest in activities.

Empowerment/assertiveness. Eleven of the survivors interviewed made empowering statements about making a change in their life for the better and becoming a stronger person. Several women talked about wanting to become independent saying, "I like to feel independent. I like to go to work, make my own money, go and take care of myself." Another participant gave an example making an empowering choice by saying, "The greatest thing is having a relationship with myself and loving it and learning to love myself, trust my instincts and my thought processes and know that it's okay to feel." Similarly, another woman who was interviewed talked about the strength that she has gained from leaving the abusive relationship. She talked about how her self-esteem has changed and how she realized that she is a smart woman. She stated, "I

can't go back, all I can do is do the right thing now, and move forward. I'm getting stronger everyday but it's still very much a struggle."

Commitment to the relationship. None of the women interviewed in this study talked about their level of commitment to the relationship and how that impacted their decision to leave the relationship. Additionally, no attachment scales were administered in order to determine a participant's level of dependence or attachment on their partner. Contrary to what is indicated in the literature, none of the women interviewed discussed their level of commitment to the relationship, which also includes their level of attachment to the abuser and the love they have for their partner.

Survivor's spirituality. A strong number of participants (*n*=11) indicated that they had some type of spiritual beliefs or belief in God. Aligned with what the literature says regarding a survivor utilizing spirituality and a belief in God as a coping mechanism for the abuse, the survivors interviewed for this study also talked about the important role that their faith played both in the abusive relationship and after they had left. One of the women attributed her being able to leave the relationship to her belief in God saying, "God is so good because this place is so nice… I'm a Christian. I love the Lord." A few other participants also attributed their ability to leave the abuser to God. One participant stated:

> I just told the Lord. I got on my knees and told the Lord whatever you want me to do, but I'm tired, and I don't want to lose my life. Whatever you want me to do I'm gonna do it. I went to sleep. When I woke up, something told me to start packing my stuff and get outta there. And that's what I did.

Another participant talked about her belief in God and how her faith has helped her to cope during many episode of violence. She described an incident where in the middle of a violent episode, she felt God talking to her and telling her to leave. She stated:

No, I didn't think about it, it was God. He told me, he said, "Get up. Get your boys and leave," because it was on my mind what my baby said, and the facial expression that he gave me and what I felt coming from him. I got up, and I got my boys. We grabbed what we could, put it in the car and we left.

Other women also talked about how God has helped the after leaving the relationship. One woman stated, "I don't know how people survive without Jesus. I absolutely cannot imagine the people that are going through this that don't have that you are being held in God's hands." She went on to talk about how her faith is also what helps her to continue to get up every morning now that she has left the relationship.

External factors. In addition to in internal factors that contribute to a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship, social and institutional, or external factors, also contribute. These factors are external to a woman's psychological being, and characteristically outside of her control. The following external factors are found throughout the literature pertaining to a woman leaving an abusive relationship: children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse, informal and formal support systems, offender characteristics, and socieconomic factors.

Children. Children were found to play a vital role in a participant's decision to leave the relationship. Over half of the women identified the children, or the impact on the children, as one of the main reasons they left the relationship. Two of the women indicated that the abusive partner was violent towards the children, which is why they left. Other women talked about the

impact the abuse was having on their children. One woman with teenage boys decribed a conversation she had with one of them about the abuse:

> He would argue with me in front of them, but when the boys around he would not touch me because I have some big boys to be 15 and 17. My baby was like, "Mama, why does he always treat you like that? All you do is go to work and come home." My baby was like, "If I find out that he put his hands on you I'm going to have to do something to him." I said, "No, it's okay. You can go ahead on back to the park." He said, "No." I said, "You can go ahead on, finish playing basketball." He was like, "No. Something just told me to come home." I said, "Okay. I'm fine." He came in there trying to argue again, so my baby came, the boys came out the back room.

For one woman, when her son talked about their relationship, that was eye-opening experience for her. She continued saying:

> For my baby to speak out the way he did, that was confirmation for me that it was time to go because I know how my children feel about me, and they know that I'm a good woman and I'm a good mother.

Several other women also talked about how they could recognize the impact the abuse was having on their children's behavior. Women who had girls talked about how they didn't want their girls to learn that it's acceptable for a man to treat her like that; similarly, women with boy children didn't want their boys to grow up treating girlfriends and wives in an abusive manner.

Patterns of abuse. According to the literature, both frequency and severity of abuse play a role in a woman's decision-making as well as are triggers for women to leave an abusive relationship. None of the participants in this study talked about the frequency of abuse they experienced, however, they did go into detail about the severity of abuse. Severe forms of abuse

that were found include physical violence, strangulation, use of a weapon, and threats to the survivor. Several women talked about significant blows to their head and face. One participant stated:

> The blows rained down. It's not supposed to hurt when you comb your hair. It's not supposed to hurt when you brush your teeth. It's not supposed to hurt when you lay your head on the pillow at night.

Another woman who was interviewed remembered an incident in which the abuser hit the side of her face so hard she thought she needed to go see an eye doctor because she thought that the abuse had injured the cornea of her eye. One participant described a time when the abuser hit her in the head. She stated:

> Because he busted my head open. I really don't remember when all that happened. All I know is I remember I was outside talking to my neighbor. I went in the house and the way he was hitting on the door, it just did something to me. I took my kids upstairs and I locked them in my room. By the time I come downstairs he had kicked the door in and just came for me.

Because she was being hit in the head so often, one of the participants stated that she was scared about her memory, and she believed that the blows to her head was causing her to be more forgetful of things than in the past. One woman described torturous acts that the abuser did to them:

> The first thing he did was shave all my hair off. He cut all my hair off. Then he made me stand up against the wall for like eight hours… He just beat me with shoes, belts, his fists, burned me with cigarette lighters. He did something ... I don't know, but he tortured me. Bit me.

Another women stated that the abuser "pretty much he beat me up and left me for dead." Still

other examples of the types of severity of abuse the women experienced included strangulation.

Several participants talked about how the abuser oftentimes strangled them until the passed out.

One woman recounted:

> He was like, I been thinking for three days how I was going to kill you, and you got to
>
> die. We just for three hours he did everything he could to try to kill me, choked me with
>
> belts, brought his broom handle, pressed it on my neck, tied, took the phone charger tried
>
> to strangle me with it, but it broke. He choked me and I just passed out several times
>
> which caused me to have a stroke. That's why I was in the hospital.

> Severity of abuse also includes the use of a weapon. Three women described how the

abuser had a gun and would regularly threaten them with using it against them. Participants also

talked about the terrifying threats that they received from their abusive partner. One woman

remembered the last incident of abuse and the threats she received for no reason that she could

recall. She stated:

> The last incident was just getting in my face and threatening me, threatening to hit me.
>
> That's when I got really, really scared. Threatening me with bodily harm, threatening me
>
> because I'd asked, I don't even know, I didn't ask nothing wrong.

> Participants also discussed various forms of psychological abuse that they experienced at

the hands of the abusive partner. On woman, in particular, went into detail about the many

different ways that the abuser psychologically manipulated and controlled her. She stated:

> He just got back from school that night and told me to take my ugly self out of the house.
>
> He didn't want to see my ugly face anymore. I was stupid. He was done with me. He
>
> didn't care about anything going on in my life. I should just up ad leave. He didn't care

where I went to. When I told him, where do you want me to go? I don't anybody. I don't

have any money.

Other participants talked about the verbal abuse that they experienced such as name calling,

putting them down, demeaning them, and much more. One woman, who held a law degree,

began to question her intelligence. When describing the abuser's psychological abuse, she stated,

"It got to a point that I started believing I wasn't smart at all. I must be stupid. Something must

be wrong with me because that is what I was hearing everyday." The psychological abuse that

the women endured was part of their day-to-day lives with the abusive partner.

The final aspect within the patterns of abuse theme pertains to the survivor's own level of

perceived safety within the relationship. Previous research found that in addition to severity and

frequency of violence, a woman's own perceived level of safety and assessment of danger merits

consideration in the stay-leave decision. None of the participants interviewed for this study

directly examined their perceived level of safety in the relationship.

History of abuse. A large number of the participants (*n*=16) had either experienced abuse

as a child or witnessed abuse within their family of origin. One women, who was placed in foster

care, stated that she had completely blocked out memories from her childhood and could not

remember the trauma, but has since read about the kind of abuse she experienced from her foster

care records stating:

All I remember, well I don't really remember, all I know is what I've read in my records,

and apparently my mother had a stepfather that was abusive to her. I guess his way of

disciplining me at the time I was about two ... His way of trying to potty-train me was

tying my potty chair down to the railroad tracks, and making me think that the train was

going to come hit me.

Several of the women discussed being molested at a young age by an acquaintance. Other women described abuse they experienced from a family member. Thirteen of the women interviewed for this study also talked about having a history of abusive partners prior to their most recent relationship. A few of the women talked about multiple abusive relationships prior to the most recent. One woman recounted that out of the five relationships she has been in, four of them have been abusive in some way.

Informal and formal support. The literature describes support as both informal – family and friends, and formal support networks such as community resources, religious organizations, and law enforcement. Many of the women talked about the support that they received from family members in order to help them leave the abusive relationship. One woman stated that she would not have been able to leave without the help and support of her family. Several participants also discussed formal supports such as community organizations, religious groups, and the police. Religious organizations consisted of church groups who played a vital role in helping women to be able to leave. Many women were connected with a church group who, when learned about the violence, helped them to leave by either offering housing options or helping them to call shelters where they could go with their children. One woman had a friend who was a police officer and knew about a domestic violence shelter that could house her and the children.

Offender characteristics. Several offender characteristics have also been found to be factors that contribute to a participant leaving an abusive relationship. These characteristics include having a criminal record, the use of weapons, drugs, and stalking. None of the women interviewed talked about the abuser's criminal records. Several of the participants did talk about the abuser's flagrant use of weapons without concern for others' safety. One woman talked about

how when her partner got drunk, he would go out into the front yard and shoot off his gun into the air multiple times. Ten of the women talked extensively about the abuser's drug use and the impact that it has on their relationships. One of the participants stated, "When he started drinking, it was an absolutely unrecognizable person, from Friday to Sunday. He'd try to sober up and go to work. He drank himself into jail numerous times." Another remembered how much of an impact the drugs/alcohol had on her financially saying, "He was drinking more and more. His roommate's paying for it, I'm paying for it and he's just drinking. He was only drinking at night." None of the participants in this study talked about any stalking experiences by the abusive partner.

Socio-economic factors. Throughout the literature, researchers explored the relationship between socio-economic factors and a woman leaving an abusive relationship. None of the women in this study directly linked finances or employment to their ability to leave or not leave the abusive relationship; however many of the women (*n*=16) did talk about their employment situation and the abuser's influence on whether or not they had a job. Two women, for example, stated that they were not allowed to have a job or encouraged not to work by their abusive partner. One woman stated that her partner told her to quit the job and stay home to take care of his children with another woman who was not around. Yet another woman stated that she did have various "odd jobs" but would never have any money because the abuser would spend the money in her case on drugs and alcohol. One woman talked about the impact that her working had on the abuse. She stated:

> He said it was because I didn't work. He told me in the beginning he didn't want me
>
> working. He wanted me to stay home and take care of the family. He would work and

provide for the family. When it got too much for him, it was basically because he was

using. He would switch it back and say it was ... I'm not helping.

Another participant recounted the level of dependency that she had to have on her abusive

partner:

It's hard when you feel like you put yourself in a place, or you allow somebody to put you

in a place that you're so dependent on that. It makes it harder when you have no money,

and you don't have transportation, and you're not working. It makes it harder because

you've completely put yourself where you're at their mercy.

Five of the participants interviewed stated that they had a full-time job and were currently

working; three of the women were working part-time.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of the data collected. This chapter included an

overview of the participant characteristics, which included a fairly diverse group of women with

children. Then the results of the study were presented in order of the research questions in this

study. Using phenomenological analysis, the results of the first research question regarding what

were the lived experiences of survivors of IPV included themes of violence in the relationship.

According to the participants, themes of violence included factors such as the participant's own

experiences with childhood violence, the participants having a history of violent relationships as

an adult, and the abuser's drug/alcohol useage. Participants of this study also talked about several

factors that helped them to be able to cope not only during the relationship but also helped them

to be able to leave and then after having left. These resilient factors include a survivor's faith and

belief in God as well as having a strong social support network of family, friends, and church

members. These factors helped the participants to overcome the daily challenges of abuse.

Finally, this study found that the participants' children, external supports, tiredness threshold, and severity of violence were all suggestive to be predictive of survivor's leaving the relationship.

Using directed content analysis, the remaining three research questions were analyzed using predetermined codes. The themes for analysis included moving from precontemplation to contemplation, or the turning point in the relationship. Within this stage of the TMC, the participants talked about two different events: moving in together and pregnancy. The contemplation and preparation codes resulted in the subthemes of having a plan to leave or not and the participant's knowledge of the cycle of abuse. Participants talked about several aspects regarding the action stage of the TMC. Participants described what made that time, when they decided to leave, different for them, external social supports, and keys to being able to take action and leave successfully. Finally, participants discussed the maintenance stage of change by talking about what keeps them from returning to the abuser and whether or not they have had communication with him after the incident.

The researcher then used predetermined codes for the third research question pertaining to social exchange theory and the concepts of power and costs/benefits of leaving the relationship. The participants identified several areas in which they acknowledged the abuser's power and control over them. These factors included: controlling the survivor, threatening the survivor, psychological abuse, and isolating the survivor. The participants talked about the costs/benefits of the relationship when they described what the beginning of their relationship was like with their partner and the cycle of abuse.

Finally, again using directed content analysis, the researcher applied the predetermined codes from the review of the literature regarding the internal and external factors that influence a

survivor's decision to leave the relationship. These internal codes consisted of a survivor's mental health/depression, a survivor's empowerment and assertiveness, a survivor's commitment to the relationship, and a survivor's spirituality. The only internal factor that was not found in this study was a survivor's level of commitment to the relationship. None of the participants interviewed indicated that this was a reason for leaving the relationship. The external factors consisted of the following: the children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse, support, offender characteristics, and socioeconomic factors. The researcher reports in detail the participant's acknowledgement, or lackthereof, regarding these external factors on whether or not they influenced their decision to leave the abusive relationship.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results, limitations, and implications of the phenomenological study at hand. This chapter will review relevant findings based on the four research questions of this study as well as how they relate to previous literature. The chapter will also discuss important and relevant implications for social work practice, policy, and education. Additionally, study limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed in concluding remarks.

The Lived Experiences of Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Themes of violence. Findings align with previous research, in which childhood experiences of violence serve as a pattern of violence in adulthood (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Gelles, 1976; Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988). Despite growing up in an abusive household or witnessing abuse as a child, the participants in this study overcame significant adversity and were able to leave the abusive relationship. Several women indicated that they were sexually abused as a child, which has also been found to be consistent in the former literature as being a risk factor for adult IPV (Barrios et al., 2015; Bidarra, Lessard, & Dumont, 2016; Bowen, 2000; Cox, Kotch, & Everson, 2003; Edleson, 1999; Manchikanti Gómez, 2011; Renner, & Slack, 2006). For example, Barrios et al. (2015) confirmed that when compared to women who reported no abuse as a child, those who indicated they had been both physically and sexually abused were seven times more likely in their lifetimes to experience IPV as an adult.

Similarly, having a history of previous abusive relationships was also found to be a common trend related to themes of violence. A large portion of women in this study reported that they experienced multiple abusive relationships previously. Coolidge and Anderson (2002)

found that women who experienced multiple abusive relationships were more likely to experience mental health issues when compared to women who experienced a single abusive relationship. Additionally, the researchers found a significant correlation between symptoms of PSTD for the women who experienced multiple abusive relationships (Coolidge & Anderson, 2002). This suggests a meaningful correlation between a survivor's mental health and the repetitive cycle of abusive relationships.

Several participants identified drugs or alcohol as a theme of violence in the relationship, which is consistent with previous literature that the use of drugs and alcohol are correlated with incidences of relationship violence (Graham, Bernards, Wilsnack, & Gmel, 2011; McKinney, Caetano, Harris, Ebama, 2009; Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). In a study of thirteen diverse countries around the world, Graham, Bernards, Wilsnack, and Gmel (2011) found that alcohol use was strongly correlated with a greater severity of violence. Several participants of this study also reported an increase in severity of abuse when the abuser was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. McKinney, Caetano, Harris, and Ebama (2009) also confirmed that a significant increase in the consumption of alcohol increases the risk of male-to-female violence by thirty-four percent.

Themes of resilience. Participants in this study talked about two trends regarding their ability to cope with the abuse – spirituality and social supports. For many of the participants of this study, their adaptation, or coping mechanism, to the trauma came in the form of a belief in God. Other studies have also found that a survivor's spirituality plays an important role in her resiliency (Drumm et al., 2013; Fortune, Abugideiri, & Dratch, 2010; Potter, 2007; Senter & Caldwell, 2002). Drumm et al. (2013) found that a survivor's spiritual beliefs was a positive

coping strategy. Social supports such as family members, friends, and church members have also been found to provide survivors with a constructive means to manage the abuse.

A survivor's connection with family, friends, and church members also played a key role as an indictor of resilience for participants. The relationship between external supports and survivors of IPV has been long established in the literature (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Estrellado & Loh, 2013; Fraser, McNutt, & Clark, 2002; Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015; Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Scheffer & Renck, 2008). One of the differences between the previous literature regarding supports and this study points to the level of encouragement and support that the participants received from church friends. Several participants of this study spoke at length about the vital role that friends within their church community played in providing them with personal support. Their relationship with church friends was a vital component to their support network.

Social support proved to be an important factor in participants' abilities to cope with their experience of violence. The women in this study named friends, family, and members of their churches as instrumental in fostering their resilience. For these women, having an established network of social support in place provided them with the encouragement, resources, and friendships integral to their survivorship. That survivors of intimate partner violence rely on external supports to cope is well established in the literature (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Estrellado & Loh, 2013; Frías & Carolina Agoff, 2015; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Scheffer & Renck, 2008); however, that the survivors in the present study specifically named the church and friends within their church communities as key providers of social support is of particular interest. Churches can provide unique services and supports for survivors in an abusive relationship (Potter, 2007). For many women, church and spirituality is already part of their

lives, which allows church congregations to deliver religious guidance and assistance with help seeking as a means of support for survivors.

Themes of leaving. When asked about leaving, participants talked about several crucial themes of leaving the abusive relationship. One of the primary reasons participants indicated for leaving the abusive relationship was to prevent their children from growing up and thinking that violence is acceptable. Similarly, the participants also indicated that they wanted to stop the generational cycle of violence. The literature supports the participants' beliefs that the cycle of violence is passed to children who grow up in home where there is IPV (Bensley, Van Eenwyk, & Wynkoop Simmons, 2003; McKinney, Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Nelson, 2009). Bensley, Van Eenwyk, and Wynkoop Simmons (2003) found that children who experienced physical abuse as a child, witnessed interparental IPV, or experienced both were significantly more likely to experience IPV and emotional abuse as an adult. Additionally, McKinney, Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, and Nelson (2009) discovered that both men and women who experienced childhood family violence were at an increased risk of perpetrating nonreciprocal and reciprocal IPV. This suggests that the participants of the study were aware of the generational cycle of abuse and wanted to prevent the cycle for their children.

Many of the participants of this study talked about the significant role that social supports had on helping them to physically leave the relationship. The supports primarily consisted of informal supports such as family and friends. Social supports not only provided the participants with emotional support for coping with the abuse as discussed previously, but also were a factor in helping them to take action to leave the relationship. The role that family and friends play in helping a survivor to leave an abusive relationship is well established in the literature (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Goodman et al., 2003 Moss et al., 1997; Scheffer &

Renck, 2008). On the other hand, the significant role that religious communities played in helping participants of this study to leave was contradictory to the previous literature. The literature regarding religious communities primarily pertains to counseling support of survivors in IPV relationships. The participants of this study reported that they were able to leave the abusive relationship as a direct result of their religious community. Survivors who have been able to leave the abusive relationship as a result of a member of the religious community calling shelters, helping the survivors call shelters, or providing shelter has not been investigated. It should also be noted the regional location of this study took place in the southwest where there is a strong sense of religiosity. Results pertaining to the role of religious communities may have differed if the study had been conducted in a different geographical location.

Several of the participants of this study also talked about tiredness, weariness, or exhaustion, as a theme of leaving the relationship and reaching a threshold of exhaustion. There is very limited research regarding this concept of "tiredness" in the literature regarding IPV. Only one study found pertaining to same-sex IPV in which tiredness was listed as a contributing factor to leaving. Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, and Fonseca (2011) found that "a profound sense of tiredness" was one of the factors that defined the IPV as intolerable within their sample (p. 34). Many of the survivors in this study identified their readiness to leave the abusive relationship as it related to their threshold of tiredness of the situation.

Finally, participants also talked about the severity of abuse that they experienced and their belief that the abuser would have killed them as a theme for them leaving the relationship. Throughout the literature, researchers discuss severity of abuse as a threshold for leaving an abusive relationship. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research (Ferraro &

Johnson, 1983; Pape & Arias, 2000) indicating that when the abuse escalates in severity to a life-threatening situation, a woman was more inclined to leave the relationship.

Stroshine and Robinson (2003) found that IPV that resulted in hospitalization of the survivor was the lone predictor of women leaving an abusive relationship. Contrary to the research conducted by Erikson and Drenovsky (1990), the participants of this study did not talk about frequency of abuse, but rather the severity of abuse they experienced as an indicator for them to leave the relationship. This may be a result of the participants focusing on the severity of abuse they experienced rather than discussing the frequency at which they experienced the abuse. Additionally, the frequency of abuse may have been difficult for them to quantify, whereas the severity can be described.

The Role of the Transtheoretical Model of Change

By viewing a participant's experiences through the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC) lens, one can gain a greater understanding of a survivor's experiences with leaving. Overall, the TMC Model "fit" the findings in that the participants' methods of leaving generally followed the TMC stages. Because each participant experienced unique circumstances in the leaving process, variations may be found across each case. Results of this study support the utilization of the TMC for understanding a survivor's process of leaving an abusive relationship as well as offer possible changes with regard to turning points for survivors and long-term trajectories.

The participants discussed the movement from pre-contemplation to contemplation stages and two major developments triggered this change – moving in together and pregnancy. This transition can also be considered the realization stage, in which the participant realized there was some level of abuse in their relationship. Khaw and Hardesty (2007) also found this to be the

realization stage for survivors of IPV. While Khaw and Hardesty (2007) found that survivors

reported the realization stage occurred at either a single point in their relationship, such as a

explosive episode, or progressively over time. Their findings differ from the results of this study,

which indicate that when the participant and the abusive partner moved in together, that was a

significant turning point in their relationship at which point the participant recognized different

behaviors in their partner that were not present in their relationship prior such as possessiveness

and controlling actions. Other participants also identified the realization stage as being when they

became pregnant. IPV and pregnancy is positively correlated within the literature (Campbell,

2002; Martin, Mackie, Kupper, Buescher, & Moracco, 2001; Saltzman, Johnson, Gilbert, &

Goodwin, 2003; Shah & Shah, 2010). Saltzman, Johnson, Gilbert, and Goodwin (2003) found

that 8.7% of women experience abuse around the time of pregnancy. Moving in together and

becoming pregnant are both changes in a survivor's life that are also significant forms of control

an abuser can have over them. One explanation of this trend may be that a survivor's living

arrangements became drastically limited after moving in with their partner, which gives the

abusive partner a level of power over the survivor. Similarly, a form of control may surface when

a survivor discovers she is pregnant, and the abuser and the survivor will always be linked

together by the child.

The transition from the contemplation stage to the preparation stage varied for many of

the participants. When asked whether or not they had a deliberate plan to leave prior to leaving

the relationship, several women indicated that they did not have any plans to leave the abusive

relationship. This finding suggests that some women may move directly from the contemplation

stage to action, foregoing the preparation stage entirely. Other participants indicated that they did

develop a plan of action to leave. While many of the participants reported that they did not have

any sort of "plan" to leave the relationship, all of the participants ended up in an emergency shelter, which many indicate some type of conscious or unconscious plan for safety. Safety planning is a widely utilized intervention for survivors of IPV (Campbell & Glass, 2009; Dutton, 2004). While there is no standard intervention to assist survivors with safety planning, previous research has found that safety planning is different for every survivor and is often dependent on the individual and community factors such as severity of violence and external supports (Davies & Lyon, 1998; Dienemann, Campbell, Landenburger, & Curry, 2002; Dienemann, Campbell, Wiederhorn, Laughon, & Jordan, 2003). In a study done by Hegarty et al. (2013), only twenty-four percent of the survivors who participated in their study had ever completed a safety plan. Survivors who have had little to no time to plan or prepare to leave the relationship may experience an increased risk of relapse or may have a more difficult time adjusting to life without their partner.

The action stage of the TMC is the next process survivors experience during the leaving process. In a study done by Khaw and Hardesty (2007), the researchers found that survivors experienced three different variations, or trajectories, of the action stage: "regaining control or letting go," "holding back," and "leaping" (p. 420-421). This is consistent with the findings in this study, however, because all of the participants of this study had taken action and left the abusive relationship, there were no participants who followed the "holding back" trajectory. Participants in this study shared what made that last incident of abuse different from other times previously. The participants in this study described the impact the abuse was having on their children and the belief that they would be killed as the two primary factors that made that last incident of abuse different. The safety of their children and the severity of abuse they experienced triggered the flight response for the participants to take action and leave.

Finally, due to the inclusion of survivors who are involved in a long-term transitional housing program, this study provides a unique perspective regarding the maintenance stage of the TMC. When asked about what kept them from going back to the abusive relationship, the participants discussed their children, faith, and independence as being key factors for maintaining the change. Additionally, many of the women attributed being able to maintain a violence-free life to having no communication with their abusive partner. As survivors attempt to live without their partner, they may experience economic constraints, which may result in the survivor contacting the abusive partner for financial assistance and gradually relapsing and returning to the partner. Survivors stressed the importance of ending communication with the abusive partner due to the risk of relapsing. Long-term interventions, such as transitional housing programs, have been found to be more effective for maintaining change for survivors of IPV (Baker, Billhardt, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2012; Baker, Niolon, & Oliphant, 2009; Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003). A more extensive understanding of the implications that long-term interventions have regarding the maintenance stage of leaving the abusive relationship will help both survivors and social workers to become better equipped in maintaining the change and avoiding relapse. Survivors are most likely to experience relapse during the maintenance stage of change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

Previous research has utilized the TMC and applied the model to various populations and fields of study with positive results, which further supports the validity, reliability, and general usefulness of this model. (Alexander, Tracy, Radek, & Koverola, 2009; Brown, 1997; Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell, & O'Campo, 2004; Bliss, Ogley-Oliver, Jackson, Harp, & Kaslow, 2008; Catallo, Jack, Ciliska, & Macmillan, 2012; Chang et al., 2006; Murray, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006). However, while this study found

the TMC to be used successfully with survivors of IPV, any exploration of the process of leaving an abusive relationship must take into consideration to the various contexts and environmental factors that exists within the survivor's worldview. While the TMC provides a good framework for richer understanding of how survivors make changes, failing to take into consideration each survivor's own perspective and worldview would invalidate the complexity of the leaving process. Consistent with previous research (Brown, 1997; Chang et al., 2006; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007), this study has found that survivors of IPV may not move through the stages of change in a linear process but may experience cyclical stages of skipping of stages altogether. This cyclical and varied progression of moving through the TMC normalizes the process of returning to an abusive relationship for many survivors. The cyclical process helps to re-define and re-frame relapsing and returning to the abuser as a normal part of the leaving process, rather than a failure or weakness on the part of the survivor (Brown, 1997). One of the more significant aspects of discovering the effectiveness of using the TMC to understand the leaving process is the improvement of stage-tailored interventions for survivors who are in the various stages of the leaving process. It is reasonable to assume that survivors, who are in the precontemplation stage, or denial of the abuse, will need different interventions than survivors who are ready to take action to leave the relationship. The TMC is helpful in helping social workers to understand a survivor's procedure for leaving and it informs what intervention may be most appropriate. The participants of this study had all reached the action stage at which they had taken action to leave the relationship but did identify going through the various TMC stages, thus supporting the utilization of the TMC model for understanding a survivor's change process.

Social Exchange Theory and the Decision to Leave

By viewing a survivor's experiences through a theoretical lens of social cognitive theory,

there was an increased understanding of women's lived experiences, personal meanings, and varied strategies that women utilized to leave the abusive relationships. Concepts within social exchange theory, such as power and cost/benefit analyses, can provide researchers with a framework for exploring these dimensions in the lives of survivors of IPV. An individual who possesses and maintains power in a relationship receives more desired outcomes than the other individual. Social exchange theorists postulate that violence is a type of tool utilized when an individual lacks other reasonable resources to serve as bases for their power (Blau, 1964; Cook & Emerson, 1987; Molm, 1997). Participants in this study talked about a significant number of tactics that the abuser deployed in order to gain power over them, which included controlling the survivor, threatening the survivor, psychologically abusing the survivor, and isolating the survivor.

Applying SET's cost/benefit analysis with survivors may help them to recognize both the costs of staying in the abusive relationship as compared with the related benefits. Participants in this study identified the beginning of the relationship as experiencing the most benefits and when they felt the most rewarded. They also discussed the cycle of abuse that they encountered and recognized how the costs and benefits to the relationship existed cyclically for them. In a non-violent relationship, an individual who recognizes more costs to the relationship than benefits will decide to break off the relationship. In situations of IPV, ending the relationship is not as easy, or even possible, due to coercion, threats, and, many times, a lack of resources. Current research regarding SET and IPV is focused on the financial, or economic, benefits survivors consider when leaving an abusive relationship (Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Kim & Gray, 2008; Moss et al., 1997; Postmus, Severson, Berry, & Yoo, 2009; Strube & Barbour, 1983, 1984). Very little research exists that recognizes SET as a framework for helping survivors identify power

and costs/benefits of the relationship as a means of empowerment. By utilizing a SET model to assist survivors of IPV, a social worker working with survivors would emphasize client self-determinism, help the survivor identify the relevant costs and benefits of the relationship, and assist them in making decisions based on this information. SET offers a unique perspective by which to explore the facets of power within the context of an abusive relationship. Future research in the area of IPV and SET should focus on determining the aspects of costs and benefits that factor into the most important roles in maintaining or dissolving an abusive relationship.

Consistent with previous research regarding costs and benefits of being in an abusive relationship (Applewhite, 1996; Moller, 2015), this study did find that survivors discussed both costs and rewards of the relationship prior to the leaving decision-making process. Applewhite (1996) found that survivors who experienced higher levels of benefits in the relationship and lower levels of costs remained in the abusive relationship, where women who left the relationship experienced low benefits and higher costs. The utilization of the SET model is suggestive that survivors weigh the costs of the relationship and their level of satisfaction prior to the decision-making for leaving the relationship. In this study, the costs of the relationship included both physical and non-physical forms of abuse, whereas the benefits included the love they experienced with the abuser at the beginning of the relationship. The survivors of this study described the many non-physical costs of the relationship that they experienced such as controlling the survivor, threatening the survivor, psychologically abusing the survivor, and isolating the survivor. As both the physical and non-physical forms of abuse, or costs of the relationship, increased, the survivor's readiness to terminate the relationship also increased.

Internal and External Factors

The findings of this study promote a stronger understanding of the internal and external factors that survivors consider when deciding to exit an abusive relationship. Survivors recognized how their internal factors such as mental health, desire for independence, and spirituality played a critical role in leaving the abusive relationship. Contrary to some research (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Kernic et al., 2003; White and Satyen, 2015) in which depressive symptoms were found to inhibit a survivor's ability to leave the abusive relationship, participants in this study were able to leave the abusive relationship in spite of their impaired mental health. Several participants of this study cited an urgency to start over and be more independent as reasons for leaving the abusive relationship, which is consistent with previous scholarly findings. For example, previous research found that a woman's level of independence and empowerment also played a role in whether or not she left the abusive relationship (Baly, 2010; Rosen & Stith, 1999). The participants in the present study discussed their new-found independence and how they were working toward rebuilding their self-esteem. Finally, several participants cited "God" as being a contributing factor for leaving the abusive relationship, which is consistent with prior research (Drum et al., 2013; Fortune, Abugideiri, & Dratch, 2010, Potter, 2007). Spirituality has been isolated as a significant internal motivational factor that plays a role in a survivor's decision-making process to leave the relationship. Contrary to previous research and theory, the participants of this study did not discuss their level of commitment to the relationship and the role that played in whether or not they left. This suggests that, at least for the women of this study, their level of commitment to the relationship had a nominal impact on their decision-making to leave. This is significant as many researchers previously found that regardless of the severity of abuse, higher level of commitment to the relationship impacted a woman's decision to stay in the relationship (Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006; Strube

& Barbour, 1984; Truman-Schram, Cann, Calhoun, & Vanwallendael, 2000). It is possible that, for the women of this study, the other internal and external factors outweighed their level of commitment to the relationship.

External factors associated with leaving include children, patterns of abuse, history of abuse, partner's behaviors and actions, and socioeconomic factors, including employment. All of the participants of this study had children. Throughout the literature, children are a primary reason for survivors remaining in an abusive relationship, but children are also used as a reason for leaving. Over half of the participants in this study recognized that the children played a role in their decision to leave the relationship. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Meyer (2011) in which 55% of survivors reported that their decision to leave the abusive relationship was a result of wanting to protect their children from the abusive environment. In a study done by LaComb-Davis (2013), the researcher found that "mothering in the context of intimate partner violence involves both fulfillment and exploitation" (p. 152).

The participants of this study reflected candidly about the severity of abuse that was experienced from their partner. Severity of abuse was found in the research literature to be an external factor that contributed to the decision to leave. Contrary to Erikson and Drenovsky's (1990) findings that frequency, rather than severity, is a better indicator of leaving an abusive relationship, participants in this study did not reflect upon their frequency of abuse as much as the severity of abuse that they experienced. As described in the review of the literature, previous research regarding severity of abuse is inconsistent. Without completing an abuse inventory, the participants in this study described the severity of abuse they endured. For example, a participant's experience with strangulation was commonly described by many of the women. Previous research found that a survivor's risk of homicide increased seven times for women who

had been strangled by their partner (Glass et al., 2008). The risks and long-term effects of strangulation continue to be exposed in the literature.

Several participants also talked about the sexual abuse that they experienced while in the abusive relationship. Bergen (2006) and Messing, Thaller, and Bagwell (2014) found that over fifty percent of male abusers had sexually assaulted their partners at some point. Several of the participants minimized the sexual abuse they experienced and discussed the sexual abuse as an afterthought to the physical abuse. This may be a result of the myth that individuals in an intimate relationship cannot be sexually assaulted (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011). A few of the participants shared about being sexually abused directly following a physical assault. Many of the participants who opened up about sexual assault talked about it as a way to placate the abuser. When describing the sexual assault they endured, the participants of this study reported that many times the sexual assault occurred after a physically abusive incident and the participants stated that they would feel obligated to have sex as a means of calming the abuser down.

For many of the participants, psychological abuse was normalized in their relationships. When discussing the verbal abuse they experienced, the participants of this study minimized their experiences. Previous research has found that psychological abuse may be a more accurate predictor of leaving an abusive relationship than physical violence (Arias & Pape, 1999; Hilbert, Kolia, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Shortt, 1996; Lacey, 2010). Conflicting with the aforementioned research, the participants of this study did not discuss the psychological abuse as a trigger for them leaving the relationship. Similarly, participants in this study also did not directly speak to their perceived safety within the context of the violent relationship.

Another external factor that contributed to survivors' decisions to leave abusive relationships was their history of abuse. Consistent with previous research, many of the participants of this study had experienced or witnessed some form of abuse in their family of origin (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988). This generational cycle of abuse may also be associated with leaving the relationship for their children. The participants who experienced abuse as a child experience a similar cycle of abuse as adults. Participants recognized the cycle within their own lives and reported that they did not want that behavior to continue for their children.

As discussed previously, both formal and informal levels of support were reported to be significant external factors that influenced a survivor's decision to leave the abusive relationship. Participants of this study discussed the level of emotional support they received from their informal social support network. Goodman et al. (2005) found social support to be a protective factor for survivors attempting to leave an abusive relationship. Consistent with the research conducted by Postmus, Severson, Berry, and Yoo (2009), very few participants reported material support from family and friends such as living arrangements or finances. Several of the participants spoke extensively about the high levels of support they received from church members who had become informed friends. There is a gap in the research literature pertaining to church friends who provided support to survivors and ultimately assisted them in leaving the relationship. Many of the participants were thankful for services provided through the domestic violence agency they were residing, but did not identify those as being primary forms of support. This may be a result of currently receiving the support services rather than looking at supports from a retrospective viewpoint. Participants discussed the informal support they received in the past, through family and friends, and many did not identify the formal supports they were

currently receiving from the domestic violence agency. This may be a result of discussing past events that led up to leaving the relationship as opposed to discussing current forms of support in their lives. The participants may also value informal supports that have helped them in the past more than formal support services such as the agency. Informal supports may have played a larger role in helping them to cope with the abuse and its aftermath. Finally, many survivors may be embarrassed of their situation and may view formal support as weak.

Previous researchers have also discovered the role that external factors such as offender characteristics (including criminal record, the use of weapons, drugs/alcohol, and stalking) have played on a survivor's decision to leave the abusive relationship. None of the participants in this study discussed the abuser's criminal record; this may be a result of not wanting to get the abuser in further trouble within the criminal justice system. A few of the participants reported the abuser's use of a weapon. Stroshine and Robinson (2003) found that if an abuser kept a weapon in the home, the survivor was twice as likely to leave the relationship. The participants were not directly asked about whether or not there were weapons in the home, which may have resulted in fewer participants discussing weapons. In a study done by Burke et al. (2001), researchers discovered that drug and alcohol involvement, on the part of the abuser, delayed the identification of IPV as problematic. This suggests that drugs/alcohol involvement may delay a survivor's readiness to leave due to the belief that the effects of drugs/alcohol, and not the abuser's choice, drive the IPV behavior. Many of the participants in this study reported that the abuser exploited drugs/alcohol. The last offender characteristic that was found to influence a survivor's decision-making includes stalking. When stalking occurred, survivors were three times more likely to leave an abusive relationship when compared to survivors who were not stalked (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). None of the participants in this study reported any forms

of stalking from the abuser. This may be a result of fleeing to a confidential emergency shelter where the abuser is unaware of the survivor's location. In addition, many of the survivors indicated that they completely cut off all communication with the abuser, which may limit their stalking capabilities. Finally, the survivors may not have talked about the abuser's stalking behavior because they may not identify the abuser's behavior as stalking in nature.

Finally, the last external factor that was found in the literature to influence a survivor's decision to leave the abusive relationship pertains to socioeconomic factors such as employment and financial means. The range of employment status of the participants of this study varied from not working at all to working full time. Lyon (2000) discovered that the fear of economic costs as well as the potential for living in poverty was significant for survivors when deciding whether or not to leave the abusive relationship. A few of the participants discussed the abuser's controlling tactics to prevent her from maintaining employment. The participants of this study did not discuss financial stability or instability as a significant influencing factor. This is inconsistent with many studies that found that income and economic resources all play a significant role on a survivor's decision-making process for leaving an abusive relationship (Johnson, 1992; Kalmuss & Straus, 1982; Kim & Gray, 2008; Strube & Barbour, 1983, 1984). A woman's financial resources have been shown on many occasions to have a convincing impact or her stay-leave decision in an abusive relationship. In one study by Applewhite (1996), economic rewards were not a significant consideration for survivors in the decision-making process to leave an abusive relationship, which is consistent with what was found in this study. Moller (2015) found that income alone was not a significant predictor of leaving the relationship, and women who were more socio-economic advantaged were more likely to dissolve the relationship than survivors who were in more equitable or lower socio-economic advantaged in

the relationship. Finally, this finding may have also been a result of sampling and methodology methods utilized in this study. The participants of this study were all receiving some form of services from the domestic violence agency where they lived and were recruited. One of the main focuses of domestic violence services is to provide employment assistant for survivors in the program. While this was not a planned aspect to the study, it seems that the effects of the employment assistance the survivors received may have influenced the decision-making component for survivors regarding employment and income. It is important to note that not all survivors in an abusive relationship experience employment assistance and job training, which may have influenced the responses of participants in this study.

Limitations

As with any qualitative research study, an important limitation of this study was whether the phenomenological methodology used produced a comprehensive interpretation of the lived experiences of survivors who have left an abusive relationship. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions allowed for the researcher to probe and explore a phenomenon further; however, a single interview may not have necessarily captured all of their experiences of leaving in that timeframe. While a single interview approach may be the most common (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), such interviews may miss important information relevant to issues under investigation. There are many benefits to conducting a multiple-interview approach such as fostering a stronger connection between the researcher in order to establish a deeper level of trust with the participant and the ability to explore and clarify further with the participants (Adler & Adler, 2002; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1994; Seidman, 1991). The researcher chose to limit the interviews to a single-interview approach due to the safety concerns of survivors who may return to the abusive relationship. A single interview

approach is utilized during instances when the participants may be difficult to track down or

when the topic under study can be fully explored during a single interaction (May, 1991). Due to

the cyclical nature of the leaving process and the high chances of returning to the abusive

relationship, the researcher determined a single-interview approach would be best in this

circumstance.

Another limitation of this study is the number of participants. Although saturation was

reached for this study, the sample size of nineteen participants may have limitations. Qualitative

data, however, largely depends on the richness and depth of the data rather than sample size. The

researcher must carefully balance the two research objectives. Due to the limited sample size, the

information is not generalizable to all survivors of IPV. It is also important to note that another

limitation to this study was that survivors were not asked about how many times they had left the

abusive relationship previously.

Because the participants of this study were recruited through domestic violence agencies,

they likely experienced an increase in support and resources available to them. The participants

were also more likely to participate in services provided by the agency such as case management,

counseling, legal services, and support groups. To some extent, these services likely influenced

their responses to the questions. Another limitation may be that the participants were recruited

via social work advocates at the domestic violence agency. As part of the IRB process, the

researcher made sure to emphasize confidentiality between the researcher and the agency and

that the participants' services at the agency would, in no way, be impacted by their responses;

however, the participants' responses may have still experienced social desirability biased by their

beliefs that the advocates of the agency may learn of the results of their participation.

Finally, this study was also limited with regarding to diversity and only included English-

speaking participants. Survivors who are Spanish speaking, in particular, could not be interviewed, which is a significant limitation to this study given the local demographics of the population in which the research was applied. Some researchers have found that Hispanic Americans experience higher rates of IPV than non-Hispanics (Sorenson & Telles, 1991; Straus & Smith, 1990). Other researchers, on the other hand, have found no differences in IPV prevalence rates between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, however, they did find that Hispanic survivors indicate that they experience longer duration of violence, which suggests that Hispanic women stay longer in abusive relationships than their non-Hispanic counterparts (Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1988). In addition, IPV tends to be an underreported problem within society, which is further perpetuated within the Hispanic culture where a large percentage of illegal immigrants may not report their experiences with IPV due to a fear of deportation (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000).

Social Work Implications

Practice implications. This study adds to the growing body of knowledge for social workers working with survivors of IPV in order to better equip them with knowledge related to leaving an abusive relationship from the perspective of a survivor. One of the primary purposes of this study was to provide survivors with a voice to narrate, describe, and engage in educating social workers about future educational enhancements and practices. A deeper understanding developed for the need to improve services related to survivors leaving an abusive relationship and the process they go through to come to that decision as well as the need to enhance the knowledge base for social workers responding to women and children experiencing IPV. Practice improvements should focus on making maintainable changes based on the evidence from the current study and previous studies.

Expanded interventions are needed for survivors of IPV who have experienced multiple abusive relationships and the accompanying mental health problems. Multiple abusive relationships as well as the compounded influence of multiple forms of abuse may contribute to a survivor experiencing PTSD and depressive symptoms, which is consistent with previous research (Astin, Lawrence, & Foy, 1993; Bonomi et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2002). Additional interventions pertaining to survivors of IPV and the posttraumatic effects they experience are needed for social workers. It is important for social workers working with survivors to be aware of this correlation between multiple abusive relationships, as found in this study, and a survivor's mental health.

Previous researchers have found a strong correlation between IPV and alcohol consumption (Devries et al., 2014; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004). The use of drugs and alcohol as an indicator of violence is of particular importance for social work advocates working with survivors of IPV. Social workers working within domestic violence agencies should pay particular attention to the impact that alcohol has regarding the severity of violence. Wilson, Graham, and Taft (2017) found that a cycle exists between alcohol and IPV related occurrences. Wilson, Graham, and Taft (2017) stated, "Women living this cycle experience a precarious existence filled with certainty (predictable drinking patterns) and the unpredictability of drunken violence. Their fear is linked to their partner' s drinking" (p. 123). Social workers need to provide specific programming and intervention options to survivors that focus on the heightened risks when alcohol is involved. Furthermore, services for survivors need to understand the survivor's perceptions of the alcohol as it relates to the violence. Effective services should also include programming for survivors living with alcohol-dependent partners.

With the knowledge of the TMC and the processes that survivors go through when

leaving an abusive relationship, safety planning needs to be further tailored to fit a survivor's needs based on where they are in the leaving process. In a study done by Brown (1997), the researcher found that the TMC model should also be utilized as a tool for program evaluation and for the development of interventions. In addition, longitudinal studies that can capture a survivor's experiences along the trajectory which may include relapse as well as successful maintenance of separation from the abuser are important for social workers to be knowledgeable of in order to better assist survivors during the transition period.

By better understanding the types of power that an abuser exerts and the costs/benefits associated with an abusive relationship, social workers can more accurately counsel survivors to help them identify these tactics with a clear understanding of the SET framework and concepts. Utilization of the SET framework has several implications for social work practitioners working with IPV survivors particularly with regard to determining the aspects of costs and rewards that play the most important roles in stay-leave decision process. Applewhite (1996) reported that additional research needs to be completed in order to better understand how abusive relationships change and evolve over time and how various costs and benefits associated with the relationship change. Social worker's utilization of a SET framework emphasizes a survivor's self-determination and strengths. Interventions based upon this premise would focus on utilizing the strengths of the IPV survivors and assist them with sorting through the costs and rewards within the relationship, as well as the available alternatives to the relationship (Applewhite, 1996).

Social workers need to be more fully informed of the experiences of sexual assault that survivors undergo. It is important for social workers who work with survivors of IPV to be trained and knowledgeable about the repercussions that sexual abuse can have on a woman. When screening for IPV, social workers need to also consider that sexual abuse includes

reproductive coercion. Reproductive coercion consists of taking away a woman's rights regarding their own reproductive health decisions (Grace & Anderson, 2016). Grace and Anderson (2016) found that reproductive coercion is highly correlated with couples experiencing IPV and includes tactics such as birth control sabotage and pregnancy interference. Social workers who work with survivors who have experienced sexual abuse, to include reproductive coercion, need to prepared targeted assessments and interventions to help women cope with the sexual abuse they experienced.

Finally, it is important for social workers to recognize the context of mothering within IPV relationships in order to better assist survivors in the leaving process. There is a need for expanded interventions for children and adolescents who have witnessed violence between adults in order to curtail the generational cycle of abuse. Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, and Ormrod (2011) found that an estimated eight million children were exposed to IPV in the past year. Along with these findings, researchers have also discovered that children exposed to IPV are 50% more likely to develop aggressive behaviors in comparison to children who have not been exposed to violence (Fergusson, Boden, & Horwood, 2008). Holmes (2013) concluded that IPV exposure at an early age and more frequently increases likelihood of aggressive behavior. In addition, Ehrensaft et al. (2003) found that children subjected to IPV were three times more likely to become a perpetrator of IPV than children who were not exposed. It is important for social workers to be knowledgeable about the intergenerational effects of IPV on children and whether the influences of intergenerational transmission of violence from a mother to child is present— and if so, to what degree.

Policy implications. It is clear that the information discussed holds several propositions for policy that guides services and practical interventions with individuals and families

experiencing IPV. There is a momentous call to action for social workers and advocates to improve their response to IPV. Further IPV policy interventions are needed, not only because of the protections they provide to survivors and their children, but due to the benefits to society as a whole that IPV polices may have on the reduction of violence. Both research and policy initiatives offer an opportunity for growth within IPV programming. The issue of IPV multi-faceted and research must inform short, medium, and long-term policies as to what are best practices for helping survivors of IPV and their children.

One important short-term policy goal includes advocating for survivors and their children either through grassroots enterprises or at the local, state, and national government. Policy initiatives that could make a difference in the lives of IPV survivors and their children include individual commitments to providing supportive and healthy environments for women and children. Programs such as Head Start, that have developed programming efforts that directly target families of IPV, should be maximized in order to assist with early identification and response to childhood exposure to IPV. This program is being piloted in six states (AL, FL, MI, MT, NM, and SC) with funds from the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (Administration for Children and Families, 2011).

Medium-term policy goals could include raising awareness of IPV issues and concerns to the community by proving community members with facts about IPV and reinforcing collective relationships with various organizations within the community such as the healthcare system, the criminal justice system, and the education systems in order to improve responses to IPV within the community. Stronger relationships with healthcare providers, law enforcement, and educators are needed to help improve both prevention and intervention efforts at the micro and macro levels. Furthermore, the current study highlights the need for policies regarding early

identification of vulnerable children and adolescents, particularly those exposed to IPV, so that they and their families can participate in evidence-based intervention programming.

Finally a longer-term goal for advocating for IPV policies includes supporting legislation, such as the Violence Against Women Act, which not only provides economic support for IPV prevention and intervention programming but also closes critical gaps in services for survivors of IPV. Under the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (reauthorized by Congress in 2000, 2005, and finally again in 2017), funding is available for many IPV related services such as emergency shelters, crisis hotlines, transitional housing programs, training programs, victim assistance programs, legal services for survivors, college campus programs, and prevention programming. Given the widespread, societal problem of IPV throughout the United States, long-term policy efforts should focus on the allocation of more funding for IPV survivor prevention and intervention services.

Another long-term policy goal pertains to the issue of parental violence within child welfare cases. Ensuring that children and adolescents exposed IPV obtain the appropriate resources to not only remedy the abuse, but to also deal with the psychological aftermath could enrich Child welfare policies further. Policy recommendations could include long-term individual and family counseling services, referrals to such community-based organizations such as Head Start and Boys and Girls Club, or group therapy for teens with similar family problems.

Significant improvements need to also be made in the area of policy evaluation of prevention and intervention services offered to survivors of IPV. Notwithstanding the significance, there is relatively little in the way of policy evaluation that helps policy makers, social work practitioners, and researchers understand which policies reduce violence. It is vital that policy makers determine if there are certain conditions under which policy tools work best,

and when interventions might be most needed. Finally, the complex, multi-faceted nature of IPV coupled with various family dynamics makes it difficult to implement policies that capture the varied nature of IPV across all populations.

Educational implications. There continues to be needs for further IPV education in the field of social work and to better prepare future social workers on how to effectively intervene in cases of IPV (Connor, Nouer, Mackey, Banet, & Tipton, 2012; Danis, 2004; McMahon, Postmus, Warrener, Plummer, & Schwartz, 2013). The social work profession is charged with helping to meet the needs of vulnerable and oppressed populations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1996), in which survivors of IPV are undoubtedly included. There has been some research that has found that some social work students do receive IPV education and training in their social worker education programs (Cohn, Salmon, & Stobo, 2002; Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, & Macri, 2011). Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, and Macri (2011) found that fewer than fifty percent of MSW students had taken a course that educated them, in some aspect, about the issue of IPV. Cohn, Salmon, and Stobo (2002) also found that out of the 74 MSW programs investigated, only 17 programs offered some type of family violence course. There is a significant gap in the field of social work regarding education of IPV.

On the other hand, in a study done by Conner et al. (2012), researchers found that approximately seventy percent of the MSW students interviewed indicated that they had some form of IPV training. Social workers need to be knowledgeable about the process of leaving for survivors experiencing IPV. When educating social workers about IPV, it is particularly important to review safety-planning procedures with them and how to implement a safety plan with a survivor and their children. By educating social work students about the TMC, SET, and internal and external factors that influence the leaving process, social work students are better

equipped to help a survivor develop a plan that is most appropriate for her needs.

It is crucial that social work students demonstrate nonjudgmental attitudes when interacting with survivors of IPV in order to enhance the opportunities for success in working with the survivor. In the study conducted by McMahon and colleagues (2013), researchers discovered that social work students in a concentrated course regarding violence against women experienced a reduction in negative attitudes and beliefs concerning myths about survivors of sexual assault and IPV compared to students in a Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) course. Similarly, Pomeroy et al. (2011) established that a specific consideration to IPV in an introductory social work class helped to facilitate a greater level knowledge of IPV for social work students. One important educational technique that could be utilized with social work students is the use of role-playing. This could be an effective technique to help social work students to recognize the stages of change that survivors experience and assist them in helping survivors work through these various stages. Additionally, techniques for working with survivors of different cultures and the internal and external influences that they may experience may be incorporated into the role-playing as well. Finally, continuing education regarding the role of the TMC, SET, and internal and external factors for survivors of IPV is important for all social workers who focus on IPV issues.

Furthermore, educating helpers and family members on the process of ending abuse as outlined by the TMC may help reframe relapse as a normal and expected part of the process, which may, in turn, increase sustained help and support to victims of IPV in the face of relapse. Additionally, campaign efforts focusing on clergy taking on roles as not only spiritual leaders but also as front-line advocates for change could also be an additional resource for victims. Churches

could also serve as entities in emergency situations, providing temporary shelter for those fleeing their abuse.

Future Research

After concluding this study, there are several areas mentioned that could be a catalyst for future research. Many participants highlighted the crucial role that church members played in helping them to escape. Leaving the relationship as a result of a member of the religious community calling shelters, helping the survivors call shelters, or providing shelter has not been investigated. This is an area that needs to be explored further with regard to connecting survivors who have a faith background with a supportive church environment. This has vast implications for social workers working with survivors who have not yet left an abusive relationship. Helping the survivors to access church communities, depending on their faith backgrounds, may create a new avenue of local support not previously recognized or utilized by social workers working with survivors. A future study could look at the role that the church plays in a survivor's life from both the survivor's perspective and the church congregant's perspectives. This could help social workers to understand a fundamental support for survivors.

Furthermore, exploring the experiences of non-English speaking survivors and how language impacts their abilities to access services will provide social workers with a number of important practice implications. In a study done by Gondolf, Fisher, and McFerron (1988), researchers found that Hispanic survivors of IPV married at a younger age, had larger families, and stayed in the abusive relationships longer. Additionally, the researchers found that of their sample, Hispanic survivors were lower socio-economic status, less educated, and experienced abuse longer when compared to other racial groups. Future research should explore the role that informal and formals support play in particular religious associations.

Additionally, the concept of tiredness, weariness, or exhaustion as a threshold for leaving could also be an important avenue to follow-up on for future research. Several survivors discussed taking action and leaving the relationship as a result of this concept concerning tiredness. Perhaps a relative scale or model could provide a helpful diagnostic for social workers working with survivors who are thinking about leaving but are not quite ready. Future research could focus on tool development surrounding the notion of tiredness. This tool could prove to be beneficial in helping identify a survivor's readiness to leave the relationship based on their threshold of tiredness of the situation.

Future research should explore a longitudinal study with survivors who have just left an abusive relationship to better understand the long-term implications of the maintenance stage of the TMC. Research in the area of TMC can help practitioners intervene with survivors at the various stages of change that they may be in. Forthcoming investigations may need to focus on the maintenance stage, particularly with regard to survivors who must continue to communicate with the abusive partner as a result of having a child together. Additionally, it would be important to better understand the preparation stage of leaving; specifically, are survivors who skip the preparation stage entirely at a greater risk for relapse?

It is also important to note the inter-relatedness between the research questions. While this study explored the research questions independently from each other, the research also could be explored from an interrelated perspective. For example, survivors who are in the various stages of the leaving process may conduct costs/benefit analyses at each of the stages of change. Future research may explore how the stages of change, costs/benefits analyses, and internal and external factors are all influential to each other.

Conclusion

The prevalence of IPV within today's society permeates throughout the everyday lives of individuals whether through the media, knowing a friend or family member experiencing IPV, or being are survivors themselves. Within this study, several theoretical frameworks were used to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of survivors who have left an abusive relationship. The utilization of TMC, SET, and feminist theoretical approaches provided a unique perspective to explore IPV. According to feminist theorists, male dominance in society is propagated by power differences, in which case, men hold the power and are viewed as superior to women (Anderson, 2005; Tong, 1998). The basic constructs of SET, which were also utilized in this study, included power and costs/benefit analyses. The application of SET in relation to IPV pertains to the level of dependence partners have on each other. Dependency can often times create an inequity in power between individuals, which can then lead to coercion and control. Finally, the use of the TMC provided a means of evaluating a woman's readiness and ability to leave an abusive relationship.

This study's unique population of survivors in both emergency shelter and transitional housing were interviewed by applying a TMC, SET and feminist approach to identifying gaps in the research literature. The researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with nineteen survivors transitioning out of abusive relationships. Using both van Manen's (1997) interpretive hermeneutical analysis approach and a directed content analysis approach, this research study attempted to uncover the lived experiences of survivors who have left an abusive relationship. The incorporation of survivors who were in emergency shelter as well as transitional housing allowed the researcher to incorporate experiences from a diverse sample of survivors as well as survivors in various stages of change based on the TMC. Phenomenological

analysis was employed in order to better understand the first research question pertaining to the lived experiences of women leaving an abusive relationship. In this case, phenomenology was applied to the lived experiences of survivors, who served as the primary element under investigation. Directed content analysis was used to comprehend the role that the TMC had with regard to a survivor leaving an abusive relationship; the role that power and costs/benefit analysis, concepts of the SET, had on a survivor leaving; and the influence of internal and external factors that contributed to a survivor leaving an abusive relationship.

The results of this study were broken into four section based on the four different research questions. Three major themes were discovered for the first research question utilizing the phenomenological approach – themes of violence, themes of resilience, and themes of leaving the relationship. Using directed content analysis, the second research question pertained to the TMC and its application to the leaving process. Aligned with a directed content analysis approach, the researcher established predetermined codes based on the participant's transition from one stage of change to another. Power and cost/benefits of a relationship were used as predetermined codes for the third research question, which pertained to the SET framework. Within these themes, survivors identified several forms of non-physical power that the abuser exerted over them as well as costs and benefits in the relationship. Finally, based on previous findings within the literature regarding survivors leaving an abusive relationship, there were several internal and external factors that were found to factor into a survivor's decision to leave. The internal and external factors were used as predetermined codes for analysis.

Based on the findings from this research, a deeper understanding was established for the improvement of services related to survivors leaving an abusive relationship and the process by which they come to that decision. In addition, there is a considerable charge for social workers to

advocate for IPV services on a local, state, and federal policy level. Several short, medium, and long-term policy implications were discussed. There is a need for further IPV education in the field of social work to better prepare future social workers on how to effectively intervene in cases of IPV.

Future interventions based upon this study would focus on applying the relevant stage of the TMC model as well as the SET model to assist survivors with transitioning through the TMC and sorting through the costs and benefits presented in the relationship, as well as the available alternatives. An understanding of the decision-making process of women in abusive relationships that is based upon a social exchange framework would require a basis for social work practice that respects a survivor's decision and recognizes her ability to utilize resources to make positive changes in her life. Several recommendations for future research directly based on the findings from this study were presented. This research introduced a distinct perspective of the characteristics and needs of a particularly vulnerable group of women and identified serious issues that necessitate further examination.

APPENDIX A

Empirical Studies Pertaining to Leaving an Abusive Relationship

	Author and Year	Title	Purpose	Theoretical Framework	Type of Study	Sample (n) and Population	Major Findings & Implicarions to my Research
1	Alexander, Tracy, Radek, and Koverola (2009)	Predicting Stages of Change in Battered Women	This study examined the stages of change among IPV survivors and the factors associated with the stages of change.	Transtheoretical or stages of change model	Quantitative	754; female survivors of IPV who live in the Northeast	The article presents findings that indicate that women in a relatively later stage of change were older, more educated, and had a higher income. It also provides insight into various intervention implications for survivors in various stages of change.
2	Amanor-Boadu, Messing, Stith, Anderson, O'Sullivan, and Campbell (2012)	Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Women: Factors That Predict Leaving an Abusive Relationship	This study examined the similarities and differences between groups in regard to the risks and barriers that predict leaving an abusive relationship between immigrant and nonimmigrant	Choice and Lamke's two-part decision-making model and Hamby's holistic risk assessment model	Quantitative	497; IPV survivors, 38% of whom reported foreign- born status	Immigrant women reported higher perceived risks and barriers to leaving an abusive relationship in comparison to nonimmigrant women. Additionally immigrant women reported higher risks in the areas of personal physical harm, social and legal risks, and financial risk when compared to

| 3 | Anderson (2007) | Who Gets Out? Gender as Structure and the Dissolution of Violent Heterosexual Relationships | This article explores the predictors of marital dissolution among men and women who are victimized by partner violence. | Structuralist gender theory | Quantitative | 4,034; sample of married individuals who completed the first and second waves of survey | The findings indicate that women are more likely to dissolve their relationships as the severity and frequency of violence increase. Additionally, women are much more likely than men to be economically dependent on their partners. And finally, respondents who experienced more severe forms of violence reported higher rates of depression. |
| 4 | Anderson and Saunders (2003) | Leaving an Abusive Partner: An Empirical Review of Predictors, the Process of Leaving, and Psychological Well-being | This article examined the conceptual and methodological limitations of studies pertaining to leaving an abusive relationship are presented. | None specified | Systematic Review | 23 quantitative articles; 28 qualitative articles; female survivors of IPV | The findings from this systematic review on women's stay/leave decisions revealed two broad categories of predictors of leaving: material resources and social psychological factors. Additionally, the review found that survivors typically go through several phases or shifts in their thinking during the process of leaving. |

5	Baly (2010)	Leaving Abusive Relationships: Constructions of Self and Situation by Abused Women	This study explored the meanings that participants gave regarding how they dealt with abusive situations, particularly pertaining to the stay-leave decision process.	None specified	Qualitative interviews	Women who had received domestic abuse counseling or advocacy support services	Discourse analyses of survivors of IPV that help maintain women in an abusive relationship and discourses that also help women to leave an abusive relationship.
6	Bliss, Ogley-Oliver, Jackson, Harp, and Kaslow (2007)	African American Women's Readiness to Change Abusive Relationships	This study explored low-income, abused African American women's readiness to change abusive relationships and achieve safety.	Transtheoretical model of change	Quantitative	178; African American survivors of IPV who are low income	Several factors such as current perception of the abuse, number of children living with her, psychiatric symptoms (such as general anxiety and PTSD), substance abuse, and characteristics of self and connectedness (such as spiritual well-being, self-esteem, and social support) were all factors that supported a woman's readiness to change.

7	Bosch and Bergen (2006)	The Influence of Supportive and Nonsupportive Persons in Helping Rural Women in Abusive Partner Relationships Become Free from Abuse	This research examined the influence of supportive persons on a survivor's ability to leave an abusive relationship.	None specified	Quantitative	56; rural women who had sustained relationships with an abusive man from less than 1 year to 37 years	This research emphasizes the importance of supportive persons for rural women in abusive partner relationships; forms of support included the supportive person generally gave women encouragement and helped them no matter what, volunteered to help with or without their re-quest, and helped women know about safe places to go. These factors significantly influence a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship.
8	Davis and Srinivasan (1995)	Listening to the Voices of Battered Women: What Helps Them Escape Violence	This research utilized feminist methodologies to explore what helps survivors of IPV get out of abusive relationships and survive and grow afterwards.	Feminist principles	Qualitative focus groups	9 focus groups with an average of 7 participants; female survivors of IPV	Several important themes were discovered regarding survivors leaving an abusive relationship. First, they have to overcome their fear of taking action; they also discussed how their children are often catalysts for change; other influences include age and experience and support from others.

9	Edwards, Murphy, Tansill, Myrick, Probst, Corsa, and Gidycz (2012)	A Qualitative Analysis of College Women's Leaving Processes in Abusive Relationships	This study assessed the process of leaving an abusive dating relationship.	Transtheoretical model of change and investment model	Qualitative interviews	123; college women in sexually, physically, and/or psychologically abusive, heterosexual relationships	Women who left the abusive relationship because of the abuse discussed negative qualities of their partners, such as clinginess, alcohol abuse, jealousy, or control issues. Additionally, 86% of their sample stayed in the abusive relationship with no ambivalence or desire to leave, 5% stayed in the relationship with ambivalence, 4% left the relationship for reasons unrelated to the abuse, and 5% left the relationship because of the abuse.
10	Enander (2011)	Leaving Jekyll and Hyde: Emotion work in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence	The purpose of this study was to investigate the emotions of survivors of IPV in the context of leaving abusive male partners.	Feminist theory and cognitive dissonance theory	Qualitative interviews	22; women who have left abusive men	The leaving process occurs when the cognitive dissonance is so great that it overcomes the positive emotions a survivor has for the abuser.

11	Enander and Holmberg (2008)	Why Does she Leave? The Leaving Process(es) of Battered Women	The purpose of the study was to examine many different factors, mechanisms, and processes involved in leaving an abusive relationship.	None specified	Qualitative interviews	22; women who have left abusive men	Leaving process for survivors occurs in three overlapping stages: the physical process of breaking up, which covers action, the emotional process of becoming free, and finally the cognitive process of coming to an understanding regarding leaving an abusive relationship. Additionally, turning points for leaving include when it's a matter of life or death and when someone else is at risk.
12	Erickson and Drenovsky (1990)	The Decision to Leave an Abusive Relationship: The Testing of an Alternative Methodological Approach	This study explored men and women's decisions to leave an abusive relationship with regard to frequency and severity of violence.	Exchange theory, decision theory, and game theory	Quantitative	113; students in introductory sociology and social psychology courses	The findings determined that the frequency of abuse was more consequential to women's decisions to leave, whereas the severity of abuse was more significant for men.

13	Estrellado and Loh (2013)	Factors Associated With Battered Filipino Women's Decision to Stay in or Leave an Abusive Relationship	The purpose of this study was to better understand the stay or leave decision-making process for Filipino survivors of IPV.	None specified	Qualitative interviews	40; abused Filipino women selected using non-random, purposive sampling method	Leaving an abusive relationship was associated with factors such as personality characteristics, personal resources, social support, nature of abuse, and spousal factors.
14	Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, and Gottman (1997)	When Women Leave Violent Relationships: Dispelling Clinical Myths	This article explores the longitudinal course of violent couples.	None specified	Quantitative	60; random recruitment of couples who engaged in severe husband-to-wife domestic violence to participate in a two phase study over the duration of 2 years	The researcher's findings offer support to the growing consensus that violent relationships are more likely to end than previously thought. Wives were more likely to leave husbands who were more emotionally abusive, generally antisocial, and who showed greater physiological arousal in nonviolent arguments; they were also more inclined to leave the higher their own marital dissatisfaction and the more they defended themselves in an assertive manner.

15	Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan (2001)	Formerly Battered Women: A Qualitative Study of Their Experiences in Making a Decision to Divorce and Carrying it Out	This article explores survivors of IPV who decide to divorce violent husbands, and actually succeed in seeing the separation through.	Ecological model	Qualitative interviews	15; formerly abused divorced women	The findings show that women who leave and divorce an abusive partner contextualize the factors on four levels of factors: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural-organizational, and sociocultural legal. The researchers utilize core components of the ecological approach to interpret their findings.
16	Kim and Gray (2008)	Leave or Stay? Battered Women's Decision After Intimate Partner Violence	This study examined a woman's decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship based financial independence, witness of parental violence, psychological factors, and the police response to the domestic violence call.	None specified	Quantitative	577; victims of domestic violence cases reported to a police department	Leaving an abusive relationship is affected by how much survivors are financially dependent on the abusers and by their level of fear, self-esteem, and locus of control. Researchers also found that women who witnessed parental violence were no more likely to leave than those who did not.

17	Koepsell, Kernic, and Holt (2006)	Factors that Influence Battered Women to Leave their Abusive Relationships	The research explores the following factors related to leaving an abusive relationship: relationship characteristics, external support, and health status of the survivors.	None specified	Quantitative	301; female survivors of IPV who participated in the Women's Wellness Study	After analyzing a survivor's relationship characteristics, external support, and health status, the researchers found that the only factor that predicted a survivor leaving an abusive relationship was their age.
18	Lacey (2010)	When is it Enough for Me to Leave? Black and Hispanic Women's Response to Violent Relationships	This article examines the role of socioeconomic status, relationship investment and psychological abuse in Black and Hispanic women's decisions to leave or stay in violent relationships.	Exchange theory	Quantitative	45 Black women and 47 Hispanic women; participants of the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS)	Results found that Hispanic women who had a higher income were more likely to stay in the abusive relationship; additionally, Black women who are committed to their relationship are more likely to stay. Finally, psychological abuse significantly influences both Black and Hispanic women adversely and they are likely to leave when this occurs.

| 19 | Lerner and Kennedy (2000) | Stay – Leave Decision Making in Battered Women: Trauma, Coping and Self-Efficacy | The purpose of this study was to address the readiness for change construct in understanding the stay–leave decision making of battered women. | None specified | Quantitative | 191; women currently or formerly in an abusive relationship | Researchers conducted an investigation of survivors at different points in time (>6 months, 6 mo.-1 yr., 1 yr.-3 yrs., < 3 yrs.). They found that women who have left the abusive relationship for less than 6 months experience significantly different psychological experiences. They have low levels of confidence about leaving, a high temptation to return, a high demand on coping resources, and trauma symptoms such as sleep disturbance, depression, and dissociation are high. |

| 20 | Meyer (2010) | Seeking Help to Protect the Children?: The Influence of Children on Women's Decisions to Seek Help When Experiencing IPV | This study uses a quantitative approach to examine the factors that influence survivors' decisions on whether and where to seek help for leaving an abusive relationship. | None specified | Quantitative | 2,276; sub-sample from the overall International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) who reported having experienced IPV at some point in time | Survivors who sought informal support, such as immediate family, consisted of over half of the sample. Forty two percent of help-seeking survivors talked to some form of formal support network. Survivors who contacted the police more commonly reported having children who witnessed one or more of the abusive incidents. The most prominent predictor of any type of help seeking in relation to IPV was the involvement of children. Children who had witnessed the abuse had the largest effect on a survivor's likelihood of disclosing the abuse to a formal source of support. |

21	Meyer (2011)	'Acting in the Children's Best Interest?': Examining Victims' Responses to Intimate Partner Violence	The purpose of this study was to analyze the role that children play in a survivor's help-seeking behavior	None specified	Qualitative interviews	29; survivors of IPV	Fifty five percent of survivors reported that their eventual decision to seek help was informed by their desire to protect the children from the IPV. Additionally 68.8% also experienced the presence of their children as a barrier to help seeking at some point in their relationship.
22	Moss, Pitula, Campbell, and Halstead (1997)	The Experience of Terminating an Abusive Relationship from an Anglo and African American Perspective: A Qualitative Descriptive Study	This exploratory study was designed to investigate the termination process of African American survivors of IPV.	Feminist theory	Qualitative interviews	15 Black women and 15 White women; survivors of IPV	The authors identified leaving an abusive relationship as a process of "being in," "getting out," and "going on." Additionally, researchers found that Black women did not go out of the community for help and stayed within their internal familial support networks.

| 23 | Murray, Crowe, and Flasch (2015) | Turning Points: Critical Incidents Prompting Survivors to Begin the Process of Terminating Abusive Relationships | The purpose of this study is to analyze turning points in victims' decisions to leave abusive relationships. | Transtheoretical model of change | Qualitative interviews | 123; Survivors of past abusive relationships | The researcher's data analysis revealed six turning point themes, which consists of the following: 1) facing the threat of severe violence, 2) changing their perspective about the relationship, abuse, and/or their partner, 3) learning about the dynamics of abuse, 4) experiencing an intervention from external sources or consequences, 5) realizing the impact of the violence on children, and 6) the termination of the relationship. |

| 24 | Pape and Arias (2000) | The Role of Perceptions and Attributions in Battered Women's Intentions to Permanently End their Violent Relationships | The purpose of this study is to test the attributions or emotional reactions to partner violence in the relationship between violence severity and frequency and women's decision making to leave the relationship. | Attribution theory | Quantitative | 68; women residing in battered women's shelters | The results indicated that a survivor's perception of increases in the frequency and severity of violence over time were significantly related to women's attributions for the violence, the severity of nervousness reported subsequent to a violent episode, and the intention to leave the abusive relationship. |

| 25 | Potter (2007) | Battered Black Women's use of Religious Services and Spirituality for Assistance in Leaving Abusive Relationships | This article examines battered Black women's use of religion and spirituality during the process of leaving their abusive relationships. | None specified | Qualitative interviews | 40; battered Black women | Religion and spirituality for survivors of IPV was common, regardless of the respondent's age, socioeconomic class, and education level. Christian women interviewed were disappointed in the advice they received from clergy members who suggested they remain in the relationships and work harder. Additionally, Christian women may also not seek out cleric assistance because of their perception that the church would not help. Conversely, Muslim women found more satisfying cleric responses to partner abuse than Christian women. |

26	Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, and Barg (2010)	"I didn't want to put them through that": The Influence of Children on Victim Decision-making in Intimate Partner Violence Cases	The purpose of this study is to explore a survivor's experience about how children play a role in their decision-making and help seeking behaviors.	None specified	Qualitative focus groups	39; adult women who had experienced legal system intervention for IPV victimization and had children	Children play a significant role in a woman's help seeking and leaving behavior. Survivor's wanted to protect their children from IPV but also to protect their children from interacting with the legal system and/or CPS.
27	Rosen and Stith (1999)	Women Terminating Abusive Dating Relationships: A Qualitative Study	This research explores the leaving process that leads to survivor's leaving an abusive relationship.	None specified	Qualitative interviews	11; multiple case qualitative design study of women who experienced intimate partner violence	Researchers utilize the experiences of the participants to better understand the disentanglement process woman experience in leaving an abusive relationship. Themes of the disentanglement process include: seeds of doubt, turning points, reappraisals, self-reclaiming actions, objective reflections, last straw events, and pragmatic shifts.

28	Scheffer and Renck (2008)	Intimate Partner Violence and the Leaving Process: Interviews with Abused Women	The aim of this study was to increase the understanding the process abused women experience when leaving heterosexual violent relationships.	None specified	Qualitative interviews	14; women who had been living in heterosexual violent relationships throughout Sweden	The authors found several themes such as factors that prevented a woman from leaving, the balancing process between leaving and staying, and finally the turning point when they leave. The authors found that fear plays a major role in the leaving process. The results from this study show that leaving tends to be a long, drawn out process, in which several attempts are made to leave and eventually ends in a physical separation.
29	Shurman and Rodriguez (2006)	Cognitive-affective Predictors of Women's Readiness to End Domestic Violence Relationships	The purpose of this study is to explore the internal psychological barriers women encounter when leaving an abusive relationship.	Transtheoretical model of change and cognitive behavioral theory (CBT)	Quantitative	85; women living in domestic violence shelters and transitional housing programs	Results found that a woman's overall readiness to end their abusive relationship was significantly predicted by her level of attachment and levels of emotion while controlling for severity of psychological abuse. Additionally, the results found significant variables that indicate movement between the stages of change.

30	Stroshine and Robinson (2003)	The Decision To End Abusive Relationships: The Role of Offender Characteristics	This study aims to identify the factors involved in the decision to end an abusive relationship, particularly related to the role of offender characteristics.	None specified	Quantitative	307; women whose partners were arrested for domestic violence incidents	The researcher's analyses demonstrated that offenders keeping weapons in the home and a formal criminal justice response were the most important predictors of women attempting to end abusive relationships.
31	Strube and Barbour (1983)	The Decision to Leave an Abusive Relationship: Economic Dependence and Psychological Commitment	The present study examines a woman's level of economic dependence on her partner as well as her commitment to the relationship using both objective and subjective measures.	Cognitive dissonance theory	Quantitative	98; women who had contacted an attorney regarding the abuse	Results indicated that both economic dependence and commitment were significantly, and independently, related to decisions to leave an abusive relationship.

| 32 | Strube and Barbour (1984) | Factors Related to the Decision to Leave an Abusive Relationship | This study analyzed the impact that the following factors played on a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship: the number of children present in the home, the number of previous abusive relationships, the influence of social support, the role of prior coping strategies, and finally the role of alcohol as a major triggering event in abusive episodes. | None specified | Quantitative | 251; women who had contacted an attorney regarding the abuse | The following variables played a statistically significant role in a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship: employment, length of relationship, economic hardship, love, ethnicity, and a lack of options for where to go. The use of various coping strategies and the abuser's promise to change his behavior was not found to statistically influence a woman's decision to leave. |

| 33 | Ulrich (1991) | Women's Reasons for Leaving Abusive Relationships | The purpose of this study is to explore a woman's reasons for leaving a physically abusive relationship. | None specified | Qualitative interviews | 51; formerly battered women | Personal growth or some form of cognitive change was one of the primary reasons women left an abusive relationship; fear and safety for themselves and others was a secondary reason the participants listed for leaving the relationship. Many of the women described leaving as a process rather than a one-time event. |

Demographics Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS: For questions 1-21, please answer the following questions about yours

1. Sex
    □ Female   □ Male
    □ Transgender   □ Other (specify): _____

2. Age? _____

3. Race / Ethnicity (check all that apply)
    □ Latino / Hispanic   □ Asian/Pacific Islander
    □ Caucasian (not Hispanic)   □ American Indian
    □ African American   □ Other (specify): _____

4. What languages are currently spoken in your home?
    □ English
    □ Spanish
    □ Other (specify): _____

5. What religion are you?
    □ Catholic   □ Muslim
    □ Christian/Protestant   □ Spiritual, not religious
    □ Jewish   □ Atheist
    □ Other (specify): _____

6. Highest level of education you completed?
    □ Less than High School   □ Some College / Trade
    □ High School / GED   □ College Graduate
    □ Vocational / Trade   □ Post Graduate
    □ Some College

7. What's your relationship status?
    □ Single   □ Divorced
    □ Intimate Partner (not married)   □ Widowed
    □ Legally Married   □ Other (specify): _____
    □ Separated

8. How many times have you been married? (specify number):
_____

9. Do you currently have health insurance?
 ☐ Yes
 ☐ No
 ☐ Unsure

10. What is your total household income (without your partner's income)?
 ☐ Less than $25,000
 ☐ $25,000 to $49,999
 ☐ $50,000 to $74,999
 ☐ $75,000 to $99,999
 ☐ $100,000 or more

11. Employment status. Are you currently…
 ☐ Employed, part-time   ☐ A homemaker
 ☐ Employed, full-time   ☐ A student
 ☐ Employed, I have more than one job ☐ Retired
 ☐ Out of work and looking for work ☐ Unable to work
 ☐ Out of work but not currently looking for work

12. Do you have regular access to reliable transportation?
 ☐ Yes
 ☐ No

13. If you have children, how many do you have? _____

14. If you have children, what are their ages? _____

15. If you have children, are they currently living with you?
 ☐ All of my kids are living with me
 ☐ Some of my kids are living with me but not all of them
 ☐ No, my kids are not living with me
 ☐ N/A

16. If some or all of your kids are not living with you, where are they? (check all that apply)
 ☐ Living with Other Parent ☐ On their Own (over 18)
 ☐ Living with Relative   ☐ Foster Care/Group Home
 ☐ Living w/ Friends   ☐ Other (specify): _____
 ☐ N/A

17. Where was "home" 30 days ago? (check all that apply)
    □ Alone in own home   □ In home with partner
    □ Living w/ Family or Friends   □ On the street
    □ Emergency Shelter   □ Car

18. Where was "home" 6 months ago? (check all that apply)
    □ Alone in own home   □ In home with partner
    □ Living w/ Family or Friends   □ On the street
    □ Emergency Shelter   □ Car

19. Where was "home" 1 year ago? (check all that apply)
    □ Alone in own home   □ In home with partner
    □ Living w/ Family or Friends   □ On the street
    □ Emergency Shelter   □ Car

20. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions?
    □ Physical disability   □ Depression
    □ PTSD   □ ADHD
    □ Anxiety   □ Other (specify): _____
    □ N/A

21. Are you currently a US citizen?
    □ Yes
    □ No
    □ Unsure

APPENDIX C

Qualitative Interview Questions

1. Just to start out, can you give me a little background about what growing up was like for you?

    o   Were your parents married?

    o   Did you/they get along?

    o   Witness abuse or experience abuse growing up?

    o   Siblings?

2. Can you tell me about your history with abusive relationships? Multiple abusive relationships?

3. Can you tell me a little bit about the start of your relationship with your most recent abusive relationship?

    o   How did you meet?

    o   Were/are you married?

    o   Did you have children together?

4. Can you tell me about when things started to shift towards being violent?

    o   Was there a certain issue that happened that caused the shift?

    o   Do you remember a specific incident that you can remember where you thought things were different?

5. Can you describe to me a few instances that would lead up to the abuse? (probe for cooking dinner, not having house clean, etc.)

6. I want us to talk about the last incident of abuse. Can you tell me what happened?

    a.   What started the fight?

       i. Were the children home?

      ii. Did you have a plan to leave?

  b. Have you tried to leave before?

       i. What happened?

      ii. How did you decide where to go?

  c. Where did you go?

  d. What made that time different? (that you decided to take action and leave)

       i. Think back, was there something very specific that he did or said that was different from the abuse before?

7. Have you had any communication with him since the incident?

  a. What is keeping you from going back?

8. What helped you leave?

  o Social supports?

  o Job?

  o Financial support?

9. I want to take a little bit to talk to you about some of your supports. Do you have family and/or friends that live in the area?

  a. Tell me about your relationship with them.

  b. Did you ever tell them about the violence in your relationship?

       i. How did they respond?

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARLINGTON | OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
REGULATORY SERVICES

Institutional Review Board
Notification of Exemption

October 18, 2016

Alicia C. Hawley
Dr. Diane B. Mitschke
School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Arlington
Box 19129

Protocol Number: 2016-0846

Protocol Title: *Leaving an abusive relationship: An exploratory study of the stages of change*
survivors of IPV experience in transitional housing and emergency shelter

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above
referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the
protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
  achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior,
  unless:(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be
  identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of
  the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk
  of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability,
  or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **October 18, 2016.**

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB
any proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research,
during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, **are not initiated without prior IRB**
review and approval except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject."
All proposed changes to the research must be submitted via the electronic submission system
prior to implementation. Please also be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to
report local adverse (unanticipated) events to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services
within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key
personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subject Protection (HSP) Training on
file with this office. Completion certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing
commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further
assistance, please contact Regulatory Services at regulatoryservices@uta.edu or 817-272-2105.

Appendix E

Are you interested???

University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work researchers are **seeking participants to conduct interviews and complete a short survey**.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: You must be formerly a victim of domestic violence either in emergency shelter or transitional housing. I am interested in learning about your stories in order to come up with better strategies for helping women end the cycle of domestic violence.

During the interview I will ask you about your experiences with domestic violence, what growing up was like, social support, other life experiences, and much more.

Please plan for 1 to 1 ½ hours for the interview and survey.

Participants will be given a $20 Wal-Mart gift card for participating in the interview.

Please **talk with your case manager if you are interested** in participating in the research or call Alicia Hawley at (682) 235-5835 for more information.

(682) 235-5835

(682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study   (682) 235-5835   UTA Research Study

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