Deconstructing the Universal Woman:

Exploring How Domestic Violence is Experienced Among the Russian, African - American, and Hispanic Communities in Sacramento County

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Dedications

This is dedicated to my husband and the love of my life, David.

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ABSTRACT

Deconstructing the Universal Woman:
Exploring How Domestic Violence Is Experienced in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic Communities in Sacramento County
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In 1985 former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop declared domestic violence (DV) a public health problem. Understood as a cycle of violence, DV is a learned behavior that future generations are destined to repeat in the absence of effective intervention and prevention. While DV programs are available for all victims, most programs approach DV as a gender-based problem and offer services assuming that all women experience DV similarly. However, research shows that women of different races and ethnicities experience DV differently due to the multilayered cultural contexts within which these women live. As a result, DV programs that treat the "universal woman" may unintentionally rebuff non-White and/or non-U.S. natives. In an effort to increase awareness and eliminate any perceived access barriers, a phenomenological method will be used within a social-ecological framework to understand the unique experiences of Russian, African American, and Hispanic DV victims living in Sacramento County. By using the social-ecological framework, as driven by the concept of intersectionality, the study may demonstrate that domestic violence agencies need to address the unique experiences and interpretations of DV victimization within these communities,

A total of 11 out of 16 candidates were interviewed: three Russian, five African American, and three Hispanic women. The common themes that emerged were surrender, concealment, learned helplessness, escalation, and resilience and reconnection.

It was determined that while the participants have had similar experiences with domestic violence, how they interpreted and reacted to the experiences varied according to their childhood and adult social ecologies. It was also determined that policies, laws, and initiatives to eliminate domestic violence in the macrosystem were ineffective in communities with contradictory exosystems. The need for cultural competence in domestic violence agencies is less of a requirement than the need to provide treatment that addresses victims' entire social ecologies, which will vary by individual, regardless of race and/or ethnicity. The recommendations to address women's social ecologies, and specifically the communities in which these women live, were the implementation of community ambassador, public school, and church programs; long-term advocacy; and comprehensive treatment that includes addressing the victim's exosystem.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Introduction to the Problem

> Where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246)

Defined by the United States (U.S.) Department of Justice (2012) as “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner . . . includes behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce . . . injure or wound someone,” domestic violence is a silent but pervasive plague that on average affects 25% of U.S. women during their lifetimes (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007, p. 1). In a 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey, it was estimated that 40% of all African American, 53.8% of non-Hispanic multiracial, and 37% of Hispanic women living in the U.S. were victims of physical or sexual abuse and/or stalking by an intimate partner (Black et al., 2011). There is an obvious disproportion in prevalence rates, given that the current ethnic composition of the U.S. population is 78.1% White, 13.1% African American, 16.7% Hispanic, and 2.3% multiracial (United States Census, 2011).

Although 85% of all domestic violence in the U.S. is perpetrated against women, this fact alone does justify categorizing all female victims into a single homogenous

group (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007). Many domestic violence social programs are based on the needs of White, middle-class women; however, while this focus is intended to demonstrate that domestic violence can affect anyone, it marginalizes women of color, who are in the greatest need of help. Furthermore, it fails to recognize the unique needs, experiences, and identities of women who are not members of the dominant race, ethnic group, or class, serving only to isolate and oppress some of the most vulnerable women further by "compound[ing] . . . the microaggressions of racism, heterosexism and classism" (Bograd, 1999, p. 280). The result is that many victims do not seek help or, if they do, they encounter other social barriers that enforce their perception that they are somehow undeserving of protection.

Statement of the Problem to Be Researched

Given the diversity of Sacramento County, a gender-based approach to domestic violence intervention and prevention may result in perceived access barriers and an inability to reach victims from minority and nationality defined communities who are in the greatest need of services. Recognizing that women of certain races and/or ethnicities are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence but continuing to deliver services that are not geared to address this social imbalance renders nearly invisible some victims who cannot be singularly defined or are not part of the dominant class.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the unique experiences and needs of battered women in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in order to raise awareness of perceived access barriers to services and to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in these Sacramento County–based

communities. Since 1976 the Sacramento-based domestic violence shelter WEAVE has provided services to domestic violence victims in the form of shelter, counseling, intervention, prevention, and group therapy. WEAVE's current mission is "to bring an end to domestic violence and sexual assault in partnership with our community" (WEAVE, n.d.). WEAVE's founding was the result of some pioneering feminists in the Sacramento community who sought to address the problem of domestic violence by offering services to the "universal woman." The universal woman was thought of as every woman, one who is devoid of sociopolitical and cultural contexts (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010).

Historically, feminism addressed the unique voice and experience of the woman, which had been long overlooked by the dominant patriarchal society; however, in the 1970s and 1980s, a debate ensued over whether feminism's concept of a global sisterhood failed to address other factors, such as racism, that divided the female population (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). This divisive undercurrent of racism has strong historical roots that go back as far as 1848, when the women's suffrage movement at Seneca Falls was attended by only White middle-class women, even though the abolishment of slavery was a major theme at meetings (Brah et al., 2004). At the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, a freed slave by the name of Sojourner Truth summed up this division: "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman?" (Truth, 1851).

Unfortunately, this division continued through the 19th and 20th centuries. As the U.S. became increasingly diverse and as races and ethnicities began to blend, the dividing

lines became less clear, and women fitting within single-factor social categories such as "Black" or "Hispanic" became evermore complex, since the social movements of these groups were based on the needs of the men and not the women. Women of color and/or non-White citizens of the U.S. were suspended within a chasm in which the women's movement embraced their gender but not their sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts, and other social movements embraced their heritage but disregarded their unique roles as women within those movements (Brah et al., 2004; Bograd, 1999).

Understanding the unique experiences of battered women who are not representative of the "universal woman" will inform domestic violence intervention and prevention practices in Sacramento County and other surrounding counties. The information uncovered as a result of this study will provide WEAVE and other social service and nonprofit agencies insight into why some victims within these populations seek or do not seek services. Ultimately, if WEAVE can use this research to gain improved access into communities where domestic violence is more pervasive, then WEAVE may possibly come closer to achieving its mission of "bringing an end to domestic violence and sexual assault in partnership with our community" (WEAVE, n.d.).

This study will also contribute to current research on domestic violence. During the past twenty years, in an effort to understand the problem; determine the best possible treatment approaches; and quantify the impacts domestic violence has on the battered, the batterer, children, extended family, friends, and greater society, there has been an upsurge of domestic violence research in the U.S. While progress is being made and research evidence is proving that there is no single treatment approach that will work for all

battered women, owing to multiple factors, domestic violence programs are still geared toward providing intervention treatment based on a single uniting factor—gender. Furthermore, I was unable to locate a phenomenological study that compares these three specific populations. The results of this study may either strengthen the need for culturally competent and specific domestic violence programs or strengthen the existing gender-based approach commonly used by domestic violence programs.

From an academic standpoint, the use of the social-ecological framework in conjunction with the theory of intersectionality may encourage other phenomenological researchers to apply these concepts when conducting human science inquiries, especially those that apply to social justice issues. These two concepts are well aligned with phenomenology's objective of "reveal[ing] more fully the essences and meanings of human experience" because these concepts support "engag[ing] the total self of the research participant" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). By using a theoretical framework in this study that privileges the unique intersections of human identity nested within and influenced by the social-ecology, a more meaningful and richer description of the "essence" of human experience may emerge.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions posed for this study:

1. What is a woman's experience of domestic violence in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County?
2. How do the contexts within these communities influence the experience of domestic violence?

3. How do the individuals from these defined communities perceive accessing the services offered by WEAVE?

Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stances and Experiential Base

My research stance for this phenomenological study is pragmatism. Pragmatism's history began in 1907 with William James when he attempted to reconcile science claims versus religious and moral claims; James wanted a mediating philosophy that could balance the tough-minded and the tender-minded (Hookway, 2010). As a researcher, I believe that knowledge and truth are dependent on the reality of the world in which one exists. I am less concerned about defending whether my knowledge is based on empirical fact than doing something with my knowledge to make a practical difference in the lives of others. I embrace my fallibility and understand that what may be true for me is not true for another; yet, both my position and the other person's are justifiable based on the natural environments in which we live. Pragmatists value the existence of the natural and physical world as well as the social and psychological world, which includes language, culture, human institutions, and individual subjective thoughts. A pragmatic stance is well suited to my study, since it balances both the objective and the subjective. As John Dewey believed, all inquiry is practical, and the content of a theory or concept is determined by what is done with it and its consequences (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Like Dewey, I believe that research and inquiry are about transforming situations and fixing problems; applying knowledge to improving the lives of others and promoting democracy is the goal of research and inquiry.

From a personal experience standpoint, in 2007, when I was volunteering as a peer counselor on the crisis line for WEAVE, I was told by one of the Safehouse volunteers one night that "all women bleed the same." This statement was made in response to my lamentation that I had just taken a call from a Hispanic woman who was regularly beaten by her husband, and I felt as if I had been totally ineffective in helping her gain insight into her situation. Regardless of my deep empathy, the 60 hours of State of California–required peer-counseling training I had completed and the certification I had received, my Department of Justice clearance to work with victims, and the number of services I offered to her, I failed to connect with this woman, and I intuitively knew it. What plagued me was the question, Why could I not connect to her? During my tenure on the crisis line, this occurred several times.

I volunteered to work on the crisis line because I firmly believe that women are stronger than they know, and that if they are equipped to navigate the stormy seas of the world, they will survive and eventually thrive. Living in fear and isolation is tantamount to being imprisoned. In the U.S., all individuals have the right to safety, freedom of expression, and a life free of violence; I am committed to helping achieve that goal.

I feel compelled to disclose that I grew up in a predominantly White upper-middle-class neighborhood where there were very few people of color. My upbringing was based on immigrant Italian and Roman Catholic values, which are very ethnocentric, and although my parents were not overtly racist, and they never treated any person with disrespect, it was abundantly clear to me as a child that a separation existed between me and people who did not look like me. As a result, most of my personal relationships were with other White upper-middle-class individuals who were U.S. citizens. While I am not

a racist, I am quite aware that a personal challenge for me during this study will be to suspend by preconceived notions of "otherness" among the Russian, African American, and Hispanic populations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study is based on three major research literature streams: domestic violence in the U.S., including prevalence, programs, and progress; the social ecology and intersectionality of domestic violence; and the cultural contexts of domestic violence. Within the cultural contexts of domestic violence are three substreams that contain research literature on Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities.

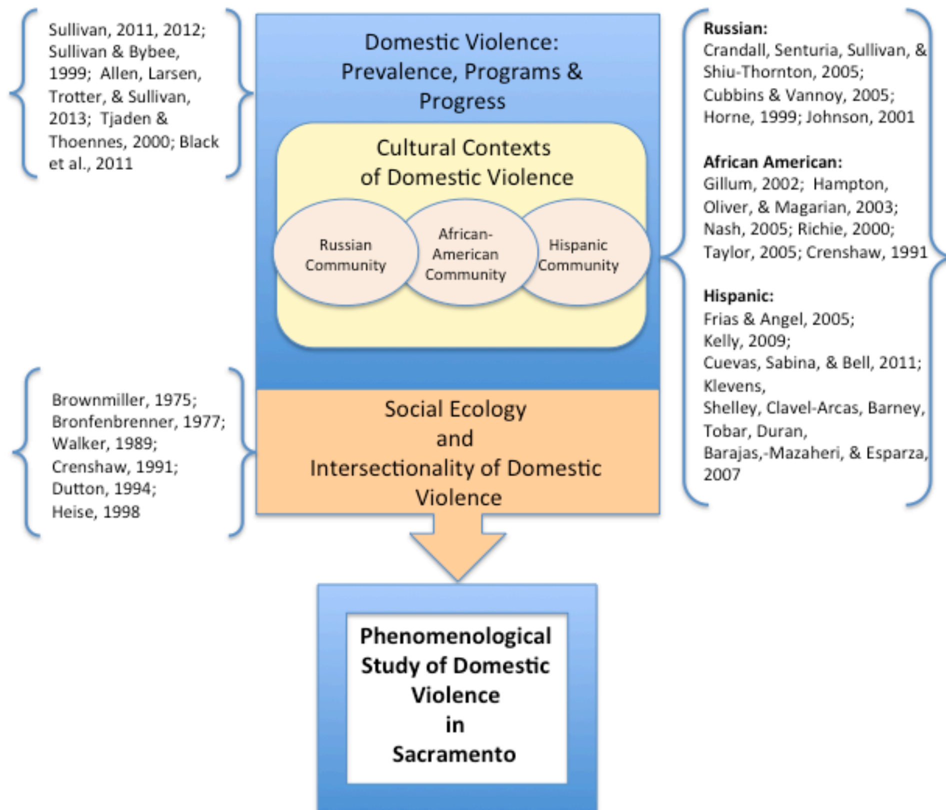

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework.

The first stream of the literature review focuses on how domestic violence evolved from wife beating for correctional purposes, as condoned by local, state, and federal government, to an illegal, as well as immoral, act of committing assault against an intimate partner (Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Program, n.d.). This stream will provide a brief history of the social costs of domestic violence in the U.S., followed by the program response and research studies focused on the effectiveness of such a response. This stream will provide the reader with a broad view of domestic violence programs in the U.S. and the services that are provided in an effort to intervene and prevent the perpetuation of violent behaviors between intimates.

The second stream presented in the literature review is on the social ecology and intersectionality of domestic violence. Bronfenbrenner popularized the social-ecological framework in the 1970s as a conceptual theory for human development, and it was eventually used as a model to represent the complexity of domestic violence by Lori Heise in 1998. This model was adopted by the Centers for Disease Control as a way to demonstrate how multiple layers of the social ecology define and influence how an individual interacts with his or her environment (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.). The theory of intersectionality demonstrates the interactions of these multiple layers within the social ecology and how when they are combined, these attributes define the unique contexts and identities of each living being (Crenshaw, 1991). This stream is the theoretical lens through which the data collected and analyzed in this study will be interpreted.

The third research literature stream consists of three literature substreams that include research on the history, potential causes, and experiences of domestic violence

for women from the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities. It is essential that prior to embarking on the interview and data collection processes, a cultural frame of these communities is established. By better understanding some of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors that influence the lives of women in these communities, more relevant and culturally sensitive questions can be asked during the interviews.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of commonly used terms in this study and their intended meaning.

Acculturation

Acculturation obtains when individuals or different groups from different cultures interact resulting in changes in both cultures; however, in a multicultural society, the dominant culture tends to supersede the less-dominant culture, resulting in a greater change in the less-dominant culture (Gonzalez-Guarda, Vermeesch, Florom-Smith, McCabe, & Peragallo, 2013).

Chronosystem

One of five systems within the social-ecological model, the chronosystem represents both normative and nonnormative/disruptive life transitions that occur throughout one’s life and often result in some sort of developmental change (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Cultural Competence

A useful definition is: “A process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic

backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each" (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010, p. 5).

Cycle of Violence

The cycle of violence consists of three phases: phase one is the tension building when minor battering incidents occur and the perpetrator becomes increasingly agitated. Phase two is the adult battering incident when the rage that was building up during phase one is unleashed. Phase three, when the perpetrator becomes contrite and loving and attempts to make amends for his violent behavior, is known as the honeymoon phase. This third phase is typically calm and eventually transitions into the first phase, when the cycle starts to repeats itself (Walker, 1979).

Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence/intimate partner violence consists of willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior, including stalking, perpetrated by an intimate partner against another. Such violence also includes systematic patterns of dominance and control by one intimate partner over the other. Domestic violence can result in physical injury, psychological harm and trauma, and death (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2012; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Economic Abuse

Economic abuse is an attempt to make another person financially dependent by controlling access to all resources, which includes withholding money, denying access to money, and preventing the person from seeking employment (Department of Justice, 2012).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse robs an individual of her self-esteem and consists of regular criticism, name-calling, and/or damaging a partner's relationship with his or her children (Department of Justice, 2012).

Exosystem

One of the five systems within the social-ecological model, the exosystem represents environments external to the individual's normal living environment and that impact the individual's microsystem. Examples include neighborhood, parents' employment, local community, extended family, and parents' friends (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986).

Intimate Partner

An intimate partner is a spouse, ex-spouse, current boyfriend, current girlfriend, ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, fiancé, or former fiancé. For the purposes of this study, an intimate partner can reside in a separate domicile from the partner.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and reacting to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities such as sexuality, age, disability, class, religion, race, and/or ethnicity. An understanding of the intersections of these multiple identities will expose different types of discrimination, disadvantage, and/or privilege, which can help researchers, advocates, social workers, health-care providers, and so on better understand how certain policies, laws, and programs may help some while increasing the vulnerability of others (Symington, 2004).

Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness is a component of social-learning theory that describes early-response reinforcement and subsequent passive behavior. Learned helplessness is a mental state in which the individual continues to endure abuse or negative outcomes and determines that regardless of what action she takes, the abuse or negative outcome will be unavoidable. Walker (1979) introduced the concept of learned helplessness as one of the reasons that women stay in abusive relationships: "Repeated batterings . . . diminish the woman's motivation to respond. She becomes passive. She does not believe her response will result in a favorable outcome . . . the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter any outcome" (location 922).

Macrosystem

One of the five systems within the social-ecological model, the macrosystem represents the institutional patterns of culture such as economic, educational, legal, and political systems that define the ways in which a society operates and interprets the contexts in which one exists. Examples of the macrosystem are the state and federal governments, political institutions, and cultural ideologies and values (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Mesosystem

One of the five systems within the social-ecological model, the mesosystem represents the interaction among the multiple settings and environments in an individual's microsystem. Examples of the mesosystem are the interactions between events at home and a child's experience at school; depending on the events at home, the child's school experience will vary (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Microsystem

One of the five systems within the social-ecological model, the microsystem represents the environment and processes in which one lives. Examples of the microsystem are home life, school life, and work life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Perpetrator

A perpetrator is the person who commits the crime of domestic violence.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse consists of hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, kicking, hair pulling, or denying a partner medical care (Department of Justice, 2012).

Psychological (Mental) Abuse

Psychological abuse includes actions to intimidate and provoke fear; threats of physical harm to oneself, one's partner, the children, friends, and/or family members; destruction of property; torturing pets; and forcing social isolation (Department of Justice, 2012).

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as coercing or attempting to coerce any sexual contract of behavior without consent, which includes marital rape, attacks on the body, forcing sex after physical violence, or sexually demeaning a partner (Department of Justice, 2012).

Social-Ecological Model (SEM)/Framework

The social-ecological model demonstrates how domestic violence must be addressed at the individual, family/relationship, community, and society levels in order to induce meaningful social change (Heise, 1998).

Survivor

A survivor is a victim; however, *victim* is considered a negative term and *survivor* a positive and empowering term representative of the strength and will it takes for an individual to escape violent circumstances.

Universal Woman

The universal woman is intended to be representative of every woman, devoid of sociopolitical and cultural context; the universal woman is the “one-size-fits-all” woman; however, she is predominantly modeled after the White middle-class woman.

Victim

A victim is a person who has been subjected to an act(s) of domestic violence that may result in injury, mental trauma, or both.

WEAVE

Formerly WEAVE was an acronym for Women Escaping a Violent Environment; however, today it stands for a Sacramento-based domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking nonprofit agency that serves both men and women.

Assumptions and Limitations

The major underlying assumption of this study is that domestic violence is experienced and interpreted differently by survivors, depending on a plethora of contextual factors, including one’s sociopolitical, cultural, and historical background. It is assumed that White women who are U.S. citizens and the specific populations in this study experience domestic violence differently. Another major assumption is that some ethnic communities hide behind the term *culture* as a justification for dismissing the existence of domestic violence in their communities. Furthermore, while domestic violence is illegal, many power structures in the U.S., both overt and covert, reinforce the

cultural justification of intimate partner violence. Finally, it is assumed that no woman wants to live in fear of her spouse or intimate partner, regardless of her circumstances; this study assumes that the majority of women in Sacramento County desire safety, security, and violence-free lives.

The limitations of this study are that the population under study will be focused on the adult (over 18 years of age) female experience of domestic violence for women residing in or within 25 miles of Sacramento County. Although both men and women are victims of domestic violence, data on the adult male experience of domestic violence will not be included in this study. In addition, while research consistently shows that children are often just as traumatized as their mothers when they witness domestic violence, this study will not address the experiences of children who live in violent households (Kernic, Wolf, Holt, McKnight, Huebner, & Rivara, 2003). One weakness of the study is that some of the interviewees may resist disclosing too much about their communities or deny the existence of domestic violence for fear of contributing to negative social stereotypes about their communities. Another weakness is that this study is focused predominantly on local victims and their perceptions of accessing services at WEAVE. While the information collected in this study will be valuable to other researchers, its findings and recommendations will be targeted specifically at WEAVE in Sacramento, California.

Summary

Domestic violence predominantly happens behind closed doors and in the space where safety, security, and solace are often sought. To many, this space is a welcome destination at the conclusion of a long day. The occupants of this space typically reunite at the end of the day and share the day's events. After the meal is eaten, the children's

homework is finished, a favorite television show is watched, and grooming activities are completed, the occupants retire to the comfort of their warm beds. Regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, age, disability, religion, or sexual orientation, this space is called a home and most humans seek what a home represents: safety and security. Domestic violence destroys this concept of the home for all occupants by creating a space filled with fear, volatility, violence, and both physical and emotional pain. When I think of the end of my day, I try to envision retiring to a prison that I cannot escape. Bound by invisible shackles that are placed on me by my beloved spouse and reinforced by the community, culture, policies, and laws that surround me, I am helpless. It is this vision that compels me to honor those women whose voices must be heard.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Chapter 2

Three major research literature streams frame this study and support the effort to understand the experience of domestic violence. The first stream provides a combination of research literature, domestic violence coalition reports, and government-sponsored reports that describe the domestic violence problem in the U.S. and the programmatic response. This stream is the foundation as well as the justification for the ongoing need to contribute to research on domestic violence. The second research literature stream focuses on the social ecology and intersectionality of domestic violence. These two social science theories are the theoretical basis upon which this study is structured and will guide how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Finally, the third research literature stream focuses on the unique experiences and cultural contexts of Russian, African American, and Hispanic female domestic violence victims in the U.S.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence: Prevalence, Programs & Progress

This first stream will provide an explanation of the history, prevalence, and costs of domestic violence, followed by an examination of the resulting programs and their effectiveness in the U.S. This section will conclude with two studies: the first provides recent survey information, some of which is unique to California, and the second is a study conducted specifically in Sacramento County on domestic violence.

Brief history. Between the 1500s and 1800s, Old English common law permitted wife beating specifically for the purposes of correcting a woman's behavior. States granted men the right to beat their wives moderately or with a switch no bigger than the

husband's thumb. In 1871 Alabama rescinded the legal right of men to beat their wives, yet in 1886 North Carolina courts stated that a husband cannot be criminally indicted for beating his wife unless the injury was permanent, endangered her life, or was unreasonably malicious (Pennsylvania Child Resource Center, n.d.). As time progressed and the 19th Amendment passed in 1919, allowing women to vote, the feminist movement began to emerge. Along with the civil rights, antiwar, and Black liberation movements, the feminist movement accelerated in the 1960s, with the first domestic violence shelter being opened in Maine in 1967 (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

In the 1970s, feminists began to speak out about violence against women in the forms of spousal abuse and sexual assault. Feminists determined that three major factors contributed to violence against women: the economic disparity between men and women, the patriarchal culture of the U.S., and the failure of the criminal justice system to hold men accountable for battering their wives or partners. Grassroots organizations emerged across the country in an effort to educate the public that women were regularly brutalized by their spouses and that there was no recourse or justice for women to seek (Pennsylvania Child Resource Center, n.d.). In 1976 Pennsylvania established the first statewide coalition against domestic violence and passed legislation for protection orders for battered women (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

In 1988 an amendment to the Victims of Crimes Act was created to provide restitution to first-time victims of domestic violence, and by 1989, 1,200 domestic violence shelters, providing services to 300,000 women and children, were present in the U.S. (Pennsylvania Child Resource Center, n.d.). In the 1990s the Violence Against

Women Act (1994) was passed at the federal level, which gave grants to states for providing services to victims of domestic violence. In California, a bill was passed in 1996 that gave the court the authority to remove children from a household where domestic violence was present (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.; Pennsylvania Child Resource Center, n.d.).

Today, the Violence Against Women Act remains in effect, despite some political obstacles. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence (2010, 2011, & 2012), there are 1,924 domestic violence programs in the U.S. that serve between 64,000 and 70,000 victims a day, with more than 10,000 additional unmet service requests daily. It is important to note that during my research, I was unsuccessful in finding a central repository of domestic violence programs in the U.S. As a result, I found other reports, such as one conducted by Sullivan (2012), a well-known domestic violence research scholar, asserting that there are fewer than 1,500 domestic violence programs in the U.S. Because of this inability to identify a central repository, I was unable to verify the current inventory of programs.

Current prevalence. In 2000 and in 2010, national surveys on domestic violence were conducted to determine "the extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence in the United States" (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000, p. iii). Both reports cover victimization rates among both women and men of specific racial groups and sexual orientations. The results of these two national surveys are in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: 2000 and 2010 national intimate partner survey results.

	Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000	**Black et al, 2011** (*note: survey conducted in 2010*)
Definition of intimate partner violence	Rape (sexual abuse), physical assault (physical abuse), and stalking perpetrated by current and former dating partners, spouses/ex-spouses, and cohabitating/former cohabitating partners of either opposite or same-sex gender	Sexual violence (sexual abuse), physical violence (physical abuse), stalking, psychological aggression (psychological, emotional, and economic abuse), and control of reproductive health (forced to get pregnant against woman's wishes or manipulated into impregnation)
Sample size (n)	Women = 8,000 Men = 8,000	Women = 9,970 Men = 8,079
Rape (by an intimate partner)	Women: 7.7% Men: .3%	Women: 9.4% Men: N/A (too few reported)
Physical assault (2000); Physical violence (2010)	Women: 22.1% Men: 7.4%	Women: 32.9% Men: 28.2%
Stalking	Women: 4.6% Men: .6%	Women: 10.7% Men: 2.1%
Summation: prevalence rate of intimate partner violence experienced during one's lifetime	Women: 25% Men: 7.6%	Women: 35.6% Men: 28.5%

It is important to note that the 2000 survey shaped the 2010 survey and contributed to the development of a pilot survey in 2007. Based on the results of the 2007 survey, domestic violence experts were convened in an effort to prepare the 2010 survey. The biggest differentiator between the 2000 and the 2010 surveys, accounting for the significant increases in many of the prevalence rates, is the inclusion of behavioral-specific questions that widen the scope of what constitutes rape and sexual violence and/or physical violence. In the 2010 report, the authors included a measurement entitled "IPV-related impact," which collected information on whether the participants who had

experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking also experienced the following as a result of such experiences: fear, lack of safety, post-traumatic stress, injury, need for medical care, need to engage the criminal justice system, homelessness, job loss or missed days of work, and/or contraction of a sexually transmitted disease. The results of the IPV-related impact measurement were 28.8 % for women and 9.9% for men (Black et al., 2011). Finally, it is crucial to point out that there continues to be a lack of consensus on how to measure and collect data on the prevalence of psychological abuse, and as a result, psychological abuse is not included in the above statistics.

Social costs. The full social costs of domestic violence have yet to be fully quantified. According to Chan and Cho (2010), the studies conducted on the costs of domestic violence have mostly been focused on obvious direct costs, such as healthcare, mental healthcare, property damage and loss, social and legal service usage, tax revenue loss, and productivity loss. Other costs, such as the impact on family, friends, and the workplace, are, according to Chan and Cho (2010), "omitted although they appear to be significant" (p. 141). Furthermore, the intangible costs of pain, suffering, and the emotional damage sustained by the victim are difficult to quantify and often easy to dispute.

Using data from the National Violence Against Women Survey conducted in 1995 and 1996, the 1996 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, the 1996 Uniform Crime Reports, the 1995 U.S. Census, and 1995 Medicare data, a team of researchers (2004) estimated the economic costs of domestic violence in the U.S. and predicted the future economic costs of domestic violence using the consumer price index (CPI). Defining domestic violence as forcible rape, physical assault, and stalking by an intimate partner,

the researchers analyzed the economic burden to society of physical and mental health consequences, work time lost, and premature death resulting from domestic violence. The results revealed that in 1995, domestic violence perpetrated against women cost $5.8 billion, and in 2003 dollars, the cost was over $8.3 billion (Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004). In 2012 dollars, this is equivalent to $10.3 billion (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Because women who experience domestic violence have a 50 to 70% increase in gynecological issues, central nervous system problems, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, antisocial personality disorders, substance abuse, and eating disorders, investment in intervention and prevention efforts are warranted, since the healthcare costs alone will likely continue to rise (Wathen & MacMilllan, 2003).

In an economic study conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom in 2011, the intangible costs of domestic violence such as pain, suffering, and early mortality were included, in addition to healthcare, justice system, child protection, and other social services program costs. Converting the figures to U.S. dollars, the costs totaled $25.4 billion in 2009 (Gold, Norman, Devine, Feder, Taft, & Hegarty, 2011). Approximately half that figure consists of intangible victim costs that were not captured in the study by Max et al. (2004), thus corroborating what Chan and Cho (2010) concluded, which is that society incurs potentially significant economic costs as a result of domestic violence that warrant further research.

Domestic violence programs. In response to the feminist movement, changes in legislation, and social recognition that domestic violence is a serious problem in the U.S., nonprofit domestic violence programs began to emerge, mostly in urban areas during the

1960's. Since 1967 domestic violence programs, funded in part by federal government grants, state agencies, county governments, foundation grants, fund-raising, and generous charitable donations, have helped countless numbers of women and children in desperate need of respite. Domestic violence programs, in general, provide two major types of services: intervention and prevention. Intervention services consist of some or all of the following, depending on the program (Bennett, Riger, Schewe, Howard, & Wasco, 2004):

- 24-7 crisis hotline
- Group counseling
- Counseling for victims, batterers, couples, and children
- Advocacy and accompaniment for women as they navigate the legal, medical, and social systems (short-term)
- Advocacy for women, after departing the shelter, for adjusting to new circumstances and/or provision of additional support (long-term)
- Emergency shelter, with an average stay of 30 days
- Legal services such as help with restraining orders, separation, divorce, child custody, and immigration
- Transitional housing
- Career services
- Life-skill education, such as financial planning, finding an apartment, and using public transportation
- Child services, including daycare, tutoring, and on-site teaching/tutoring

- Batterer intervention such as anger management

Prevention services consist of some or all of the following (Bennett et al., 2004):

- Community outreach to churches, hospitals, clinics, and community centers
- Workplace outreach to local employers
- School-based outreach such as programs for teens on dating violence
- Public-service announcements and media campaigns

Again, most of the programs are funded through government and private grants, which require evidence that the programs are effective in reducing domestic violence. However, domestic violence researchers struggle with what constitutes a successful outcome for domestic violence victims who participate in programs and how to measure such an outcome. According to Sullivan (2011), the challenge in measuring outcome is that most intervention programs, other than those targeted at domestic violence, are focused on changing the behavior of the client (e.g., Alcoholic's Anonymous, anger management). Domestic violence intervention programs "are working with victims of someone else's behavior. The survivors they work with did not do anything to cause the abuse against them, and therefore programs are not focused on changing their clients' behaviors" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 355). Furthermore, not every domestic violence program participant has the same objectives. Sullivan (2011) writes:

> Women come to domestic violence programs with different needs, from different life circumstances, and with different degrees of knowledge and skills . . . it is important that outcomes first start with where each woman is coming from and what she herself wants from the program. (p. 356)

In a more clinical study focused on treatment modalities for female victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking, Briere and Jordan (2004) concluded, as Sullivan (2011) did, that:

> Post-victimization outcomes are the complex result of a wide variety of trauma-specific, historic, victim, and sociocultural factors . . . the clinical presentation of any given individual cannot be summarized merely by the fact of her assault, an assault syndrome, or even by her DSM-IV-TR diagnosis. (p. 1267)

As a result of this complexity, one of the few measurements of program success is whether the participant is leading a violence-free life in the long-term. Measuring this long-term outcome continues to be a challenge for researchers, primarily due to the difficulty of maintaining participant contact (Sullivan, 2012). Although predominantly subjective, most domestic violence programs seek to achieve the following outcomes with their participants and are able to measure such outcomes using pre- and post-program completion survey instruments (Sullivan, 2011):

- Increased survivor knowledge about abuse, batterer behavior, and community resources
- Changed attitudes, specifically the elimination of self-blame or belief in the lies the survivors were told
- Learned skills, such as safety planning, budgeting, behavior in court, and how to seek employment
- Modification or cessation of risky behaviors such as drug and/or alcohol use
- Improved parenting skills

- Changed expectations pertaining to the criminal justice and social service systems
- Improved emotional state
- Changed life circumstances, such as finding new, affordable housing or going back to school

Researchers have conducted numerous studies in an effort to determine the effectiveness of domestic violence programs. A study conducted by Berk, Newton, and Berk (1986) examines data collected between 1982 and 1983 in Santa Barbara County, California, from 155 female victims by conducting face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted when participants first entered the shelter and when they left. According to the results, domestic violence shelters appear to have beneficial effects if the victim is in the process of taking control of her life; otherwise, shelters could have little effect other than a temporary interruption (Berk, Newton, & Berk, 1986).

In a later study, Tutty, Weaver, and Rothery (1999) conducted a pre- and post-shelter impact assessment of 63 female participants four to six months after program completion. The researchers found that 84% of the participants felt that caring, knowledgeable, and supportive staff was the most important factor in their success. Furthermore, the participants believed the program helped them make a transition to a violence-free life. One piece of constructive and valuable criticism was provided by a participant of Aboriginal origin, who expressed that she "felt there should be some Native staff in the shelter that understood her cultural and spiritual needs" (Tutty, Weaver, & Rothery, 1999, p. 922). Producing similar results with a quantitative method, Bennet et al. (2004) conducted a logistical regression analysis of five services in 87 Illinois domestic violence programs and revealed that participants who completed the program

reported an improved ability to make decisions and to cope with stress, as well as renewed feelings of self-efficacy and the ability to maintain personal safety.

Sullivan and Bybee (1999) conducted a controlled study by randomly assigning 278 battered women who had completed a domestic violence program either to an experimental or to a control group. The experimental group participated in a one-on-one weekly meeting with a community-based advocate post–program completion, and the control group received no one-on-one community-based advocacy post–program completion. The objective of the study was to determine if post-program intervention prevented further victimization by current or new perpetrators. The researchers followed up with the participants semiannually over a two-year period and maintained a 95% participant retention rate. The results showed that the women in the experimental group experienced less violence over time and reported an increase in their quality of life, more social support, less depression, and an increased ability to access resources, compared to women in the control group. One in four women in the experimental group remained violence free over the two-year follow-up period, whereas one out of 10 women in the control group remained violence free (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). As a follow-up to this study, Allen, Larsen, Trotter, and Sullivan (2013) interviewed 51 new participants of the same program in 2004 and 2009, with the intent of identifying which aspects of the service-delivery process contributed the most to participant success. The most significant critical success factor that emerged from this study was the program's orientation toward the whole person; the program staff "assumes that it is not possible to develop a comprehensive plan for meeting a person's goals without knowing the full context of their lives" (Allen et al., 2013, p. 6).

One of the largest-scale studies done in the U.S. on domestic violence program effectiveness was conducted by Lyon, Lane, and Menard (2011). A total of 1,467 victims from 215 shelter programs nationwide were surveyed. What differentiates this study from others was the concerted effort to engage a diverse population of 39% White, 32% Hispanic, 15% African American, seven percent Asian, three percent multiracial, and two percent Native American women. The study's objective was to determine if the domestic violence programs met the victims' needs. The survey found that the most common victim needs were information/support, safety, legal advocacy, economic help, childcare, and assistance with immigration. Overall, 80% of the participants felt that these programs met their needs. The study also revealed a positive correlation between victim length of stay and the degree to which victims' needs were met. One key finding from this study was the importance of culturally specific programs as "the focus groups [made] it clear that cultural and issue similarity, skills, knowledge, and understanding are critical for many groups, including . . . people with marginalized racial/ethnic identities" (Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2011, p. 167). Furthermore, many participants responded that had it not been for the shelter, they would have been homeless, endured more violence, prostituted themselves out to support their children, or taken their own lives (Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2011).

Although these studies show promise for domestic violence programs in the U.S., some researchers dispute the results or call into question the legitimacy of existing studies. Wathen and MacMillan (2003) conducted a literature review of domestic violence interventions in primary care and found that evidence-based approaches for preventing domestic partner violence were "seriously lacking" (p. 589). Furthermore, a

study conducted by Rhatigan, Moore, and Street (2004), which reviewed 20 years of research on domestic violence, concluded that it is unclear whether primary prevention (i.e., education of large populations such as school children to prevent violence) or secondary prevention (i.e., educate groups of individuals at risk) are particularly effective or whether one is better than the other. Additionally, the authors suggest that existing evidence shows that education, behavioral retraining, and advocacy may not be significant enough to instigate a change in an individual's behavior, lifestyle, or choices. The authors also believe that studies should include both the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator instead of focusing on only one perspective. The authors write, "[W]e must learn more about our interventions, determine mechanisms of action, and facilitate improvements. We believe that it may be important to tailor our interventions, keeping in mind typologies . . . gender issues . . . and cultural diversity" (Rhatigan, Moore, & Street, 2044, p. 87). Sullivan (2012) conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature on the impact of domestic violence shelter services in victims' lives and found a paucity of studies with empirical evidence on victim outcomes post–program completion.

The research compiled in this first stream demonstrates the seriousness of the domestic violence problem in the U.S. Although domestic violence is hardly a new phenomenon in the U.S., the literature demonstrates that understanding and addressing domestic violence is a relatively recent research topic, since most research papers are no more than 20 years old. In addition, of the 30 studies that I read for this stream, only one purposefully evaluated a domestic violence program that was culturally specific. Furthermore, of the studies I reviewed, 30% included diverse populations in the research; however, with the exception of one study, of the 30% I reviewed, the White population

was the most represented in the samples. A good example is the frequently cited National Violence Against Women Survey study conducted by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000): The population studied consisted of 6,452 White women and 1,398 non-White women. When diverse populations participated in the evaluations, a consistent piece of feedback was the need for more culturally diverse services and program staff.

Social Ecology and Intersectionality of Domestic Violence

This second stream begins with an explanation of how the social-ecological framework is used to dissect and detail the causal factors surrounding incidents of domestic violence. It is followed by a discussion of how the theory of intersectionality connects and synthesizes the layers of a social ecology, resulting in the portrait of a unique individual who may or may not fit within the scope of the universal woman's social ecology.

Social Ecology. One of the primary questions that researchers ask when studying domestic violence is, Why *do* men beat their wives? This question has been asked by feminists since the 1970s (Dutton, 1994). Societal support of male dominance, or the patriarchy, is considered the primary explanation for why violence is perpetrated against women, a view popularized by the feminist movement. Walker (1989), who in 1979 authored the seminal book *The Battered Woman*, summarizes the feminist interpretation of domestic violence as having "reframed the problem of violence against women as one of misuse of power by men who have been socialized into believing they have the right to control the women in their lives, even through violent means" (p. 695). Dutton (1994) acknowledges that oppression of women, as well as gender inequality that is reinforced by social norms, are certainly significant factors in understanding the etiology of

domestic abuse; however, as Dutton argues, a single-factor explanation is inadequate. Dutton (1994) claims that this single-factor explanation ignores many other contextual factors and can be challenged with the obvious question: In male-dominated societies where oppression of women is accepted, why do some men *not* beat their wives?

Agreeing with Dutton's (1994) argument, Heise (1998) addresses the inadequacy of using single-explanation theories to describe why individuals become batterers or battered. As Heise (1998) writes, "the task of theory building has been severely hampered by the narrowness of traditional academic disciplines and the tendency . . . to advance single-factor theories rather than explanations that reflect the full complexity and messiness of life" (p. 262). Recognizing that most explanations for gender-based violence are rooted in the theory of patriarchy and male dominance, Heise (1998) expands on this theory by addressing how personal, situational, and sociocultural factors create a context that better determines whether an individual will become an abuser or the abused.

Like Dutton (1994), Heise (1998) uses a social-ecological framework to describe the causes of domestic violence, following the same model and approach that Belsky (1980) employed to describe the multidimensional causes of child abuse. Belsky (1980) used the social-ecological framework that was developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1977 to describe the ecology of human development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), the ecology of human development is:

> The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining

> within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (p. 514)

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes a social-ecological environment as "a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (p. 514). To describe this nested arrangement of structures, Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes a three-layered system, starting with the microsystem that represents the relationships between an individual and the immediate environment of that person such as home, school, and place of employment. The exosystem surrounds the microsystem and represents both formal and informal social structures that influence the settings of an individual's microsystem. An example of an exosystem is the neighborhood in which one lives, a spouse or parent's place of employment, the local community, extended family, parents' friends and social circles, and social services available to the members of that community. The macrosystem surrounds the entire system, and while it does not directly impact the individual within the system, it represents the institutional patterns of culture, such as economic, educational, legal, and political systems that define how a society operates and interprets the contexts in which one exists (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Figure 2-1 below is a graphical representation of the social-ecological framework.

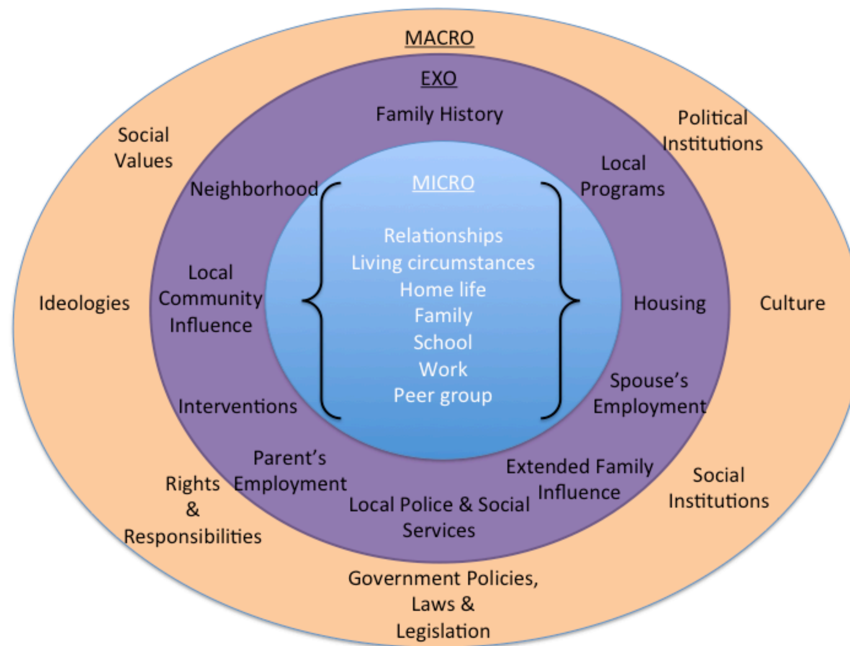

Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's (1977; 1986) social-ecological framework.

Two other systems are at work within this model: the mesosystem and the chronosystem. Within the microsystem exists the mesosystem, which represents the series of interrelationships among the major settings, such as home, work, and school. The processes that occur within the microsystem are not independent of one another and thus comprise the mesosystem. The mesosystem is an important element in this framework because even though individuals may share elements within their microsystems, exosystems, and macrosystems, their life experiences may be profoundly different. The unique interaction among these elements within the microsystem contributes to this difference (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Figure 2-2 below is a graphical representation of the mesosystem.

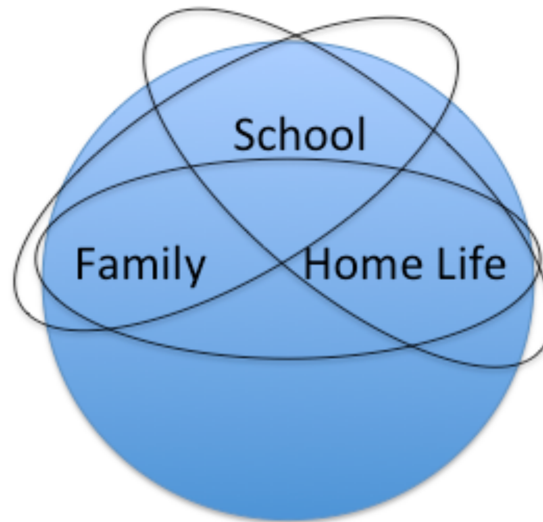

Figure 2.2: A mesosystem is the interaction among elements within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986).

The second system, the chronosystem, represents the passage of time and identifies transitions that occur in an individual's life. There are two types of transition: normative ones such as puberty, school entry, work force entry, marriage, and parenthood; and nonnormative or disruptive ones such as the death of a child, divorce, moving, and severe illness. These life transitions typically represent milestones that become the catalyst for developmental change in the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Such changes can also have minor to dramatic effects on the social ecosystems in which individuals reside. Figure 2-3 below is a graphical representation of how the chronosystem represents both normative and nonnormative/disruptive life events that can provoke changes in the four other systems.

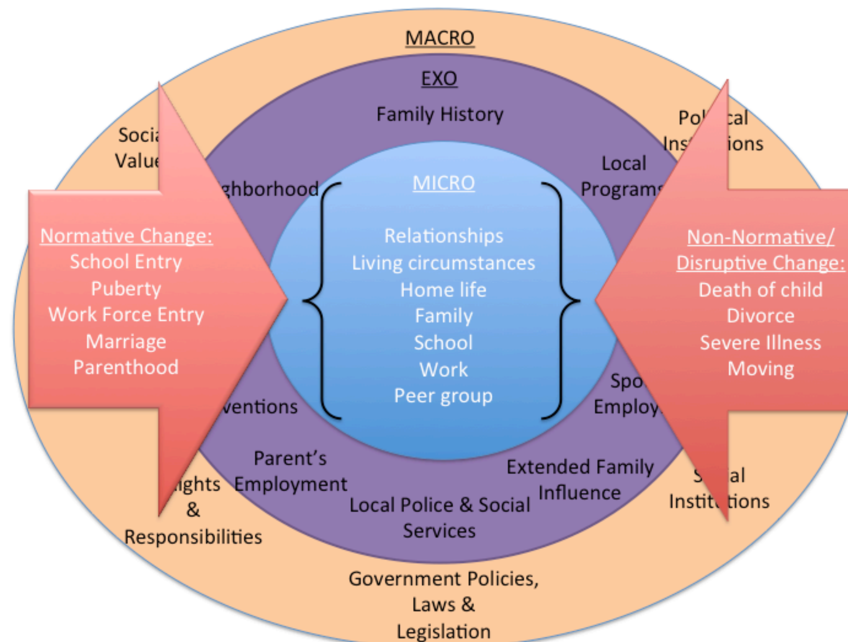

Figure 2.3: The chronosystem, as represented by the two arrows (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1986).

By applying this social-ecological framework of human development to study and treat the causes of child abuse and neglect, Belsky (1980) demonstrated that child maltreatment is "multiply determined by forces at work in the individual, in the family, and in the community and culture in which the individual and the family are embedded" (p. 320). Belsky (1980) diverged from Bronfenbrenner's model by adding in the center of the ecological framework the "individual," which details one's personal history, including biological factors, age, income, education, substance abuse and/or history of abuse. Applying the same approach and structure as Belsky, Heise (1998) describes the etiology of domestic violence specifically toward women.

Starting with the ontogenic/individual level, Heise (1998) presents factors that shape an individual's personality and ability to respond to and cope with stressors from the microsystem and the exosystem. Specifically, Heise (1998) presents evidence that when a child witnesses marital violence and/or is abused as a child. the likelihood that the

child will become an abuser or the abused as an adult significantly increases. As referenced by Heise, Dutton (1995) hypothesized that "in addition to teaching violence, abusive homes can lead to psychological disturbances that, in combination with other micro-, exo-, and macrosystem influences, can lead to violence and aggression later in life" (p. 268). In a study conducted by Shay-Zapien and Bullock (2010), evidence shows that children who witness domestic violence in the home, regardless of socioeconomic status, were more likely as boys to demonstrate aggressiveness and irritability toward other people and more likely as girls to demonstrate withdrawal and social isolation. Furthermore, mothers who are abused are more likely to exhibit more parenting stress and lower tolerance levels, leading to neglect of and increased aggression toward their children (Shay-Zapien & Bullock, 2010).

The family is the primary factor within the microsystem, since most domestic abuse occurs within the context of the family. According to Heise (1998), the greatest contributor to domestic violence within the microsystem is the structure of the traditional family. In families where male dominance is the norm, in that the family finances and decision-making are controlled by the male, the probability of domestic violence occurring is much greater. However, this dynamic is most likely fueled by the macrosystem in which the microsystem exists in that the societal norms reinforce a culture of male dominance and patriarchy. The unveiling of the imposed and socially accepted societal patriarchy is what spawned the feminist movement. In her groundbreaking book on the history of rape, Brownmiller (1975) describes a lengthy history of patriarchy and writes:

> It seems eminently sensible to hypothesize that man's violent capture and rape of the female led to the first establishment of a rudimentary mate-protectorate and then sometime later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy. As the first permanent acquisition of man, his first piece of real property, woman was, in fact, the original building block, the cornerstone of the "house of the father." (p. 17)

The two other factors within the microsystem that Heise (1998) discusses as being contributors to domestic violence are repeated marital conflict and the use of alcohol or other mood-altering substances. Again, these factors do not singularly predict the likelihood of domestic violence; rather, they are nested within the microsystem.

The exosystem, as described by Belsky (1980), is the "social structures both formal and informal that impinge on the immediate settings in which a person is found and thereby influence . . . or determine what goes on there" (p. 321). Consistent with what Heise (1998) writes, a study conducted by Pinchevsky and Wright (2012) demonstrated the influence of the exosystem by specifically examining the impact of neighborhoods on domestic violence. The study concluded that shared expectations, social ties, and cultural norms are "instrumental to understand[ing] contextual influences on partner violence" (p.128). More specifically, if one's neighborhood consists of tight social bonds and is likely to engage in a collective response against violence, the likelihood of domestic violence is reduced. Where neighborhoods are more transitory or less connected, domestic violence, especially in lower-income neighborhoods, is more common. As Heise (1998) points out, not only is social isolation a mechanism of control

used by the abuser, but in neighborhoods where community bonds are weak or nonexistent, the likelihood of a neighbor intervening during a marital dispute, calling law enforcement, or offering safety to the victim is extremely low. Thus, a perceived tolerance and expectation of violence within the community is established.

The last system that represents the broad cultural values and beliefs that pervade the micro-, meso-, exo-, and chronosystems is the macrosystem (Heise, 1998; Belsky, 1980; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Consistent with feminist theory, which focuses predominantly on the macrosystem, the patriarchy and society's reinforcement of male dominance are thought to be central contributors to the existence of domestic violence. As mentioned above, male entitlement and ownership over women are pervasive in some societies, especially those in which the notions of male honor and the approval of female chastisement are culturally accepted (Heise, 1998). It is this macrosystem that permeates the entire social ecology and becomes the lens through which individuals interpret and respond to their micro-, meso-, chrono-, and exosystems.

Intersectionality. As a complement to the ecological model, the concept of intersectionality provides a framework connecting the multiple levels of the social-ecological framework to reveal the unique and complex identities of individuals. Pioneered by Crenshaw in 1991 as a response to discrimination and exclusion specifically in the African American community, intersectionality is considered a framework that allows for greater collaboration between and among social movements (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010). Though human identity, and group affiliation, is complex, most approaches to social problems tend to group individuals into a single category such as African American, female, or lesbian. In reality, an individual may belong to all three

groups simultaneously, thus leading interventions on an individual's behalf in one category to marginalize an individual's identity within another category. Essentially, social problems are organized as if they were mutually exclusive, and as such, well-intended interventions that fail to recognize the interaction between race/ethnicity, gender, age, disability, class, and sexuality can isolate women and contribute to further social injustice (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010). As Crenshaw (1991) writes in her seminal piece in the *Stanford Law Review*, "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend differences . . . but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (p. 1242).

Crenshaw (1991) specifically addresses violence against women of color and the fact that gender alone does not define how a woman experiences domestic violence. She (1991) articulates:

> Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 1242)

Crenshaw (1991) describes how when the imposition of one burden, such as domestic violence, interacts with another, such as being a member of an oppressed race, such as African American, a woman's vulnerability is exacerbated and her disempowerment is

increased. Crenshaw (1994) also argues that because of the historical separation between the social movements of feminists and antiracists, violence against women of color is obscured by both initiatives. Crenshaw (1994) further states that antiviolence efforts on behalf of women have been politicized by universalizing the battered woman so that White people can relate to her. Although domestic violence can happen to members of any race and social class, it still is most pervasive among people of color in impoverished neighborhoods (Crenshaw, 1994). However, in order to attract resources to the cause and propel domestic violence into the political arena, a White woman to whom people could relate was presented as the face of domestic violence and thus, women of color were further marginalized. As Crenshaw (1994) states, "the experience of violence by minority women is ignored, except to the extent it gains white support for domestic violence programs in the white community" (p. 1241).

Crenshaw's work was pivotal in the area of domestic violence, since the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to providing services to abused women was only as effective as it was applicable to the "universal woman." The recognition that two battered women from the same race experience domestic violence differently owing to their other group affiliations has prompted many domestic violence agencies to address their own organizational cultural competence (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010). According to Lockhart and Mitchell (2010), "when working with female survivors of intimate partner violence, advocates and social work practitioners must focus on all the points of intersection, complexity, dynamic processes, and structures that define these women's access to rights and opportunities rather than on one definitive category or isolated issue" (p. 20).

Intersectionality crosses multiple disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and biology. It challenges these disciplines to "incorporate a view of individuals as subjects fully constituted by their societal location with a nuanced and serious understanding of the processes of subjection through which individuals live and give meaning to their everyday actions and decisions" (Frazier, 2012, p. 383). Therapists treating victims of domestic violence traditionally focused on gender inequality and treated the other social dimensions that influenced the lives of the victims as stressors instead of explanatory factors (Bograd, 1999). Increasingly, in both the psychology and medical fields, intersectionality has become a framework for offering more effective care. If contextual factors and societal influences are examined, then an individual's perceived access barriers to care can be reduced and subsequent prevention activities will be more effective.

Interestingly, there are arguments that the relatively recent feminist adoption of intersectionality is nothing more than a pacification effort within the White feminist academic community. Feminists have long been accused of being elitist and racist. It is argued that feminism's denial of racism is racist itself and that suggesting that racism occurs outside feminist circles only further denies the voices of women of color. The argument that the feminist adoption of intersectionality is a "way to project a non-racist feminist identity" certainly has merit, unless it is used as another mechanism to marginalize individuals into a new category: women of intersectionality (Carastathis, 2008, p. 15).

The research literature in this stream details how a single-factor approach to addressing domestic violence not only is ineffective, but it also further contributes to and

exacerbates existing institutional and social marginalization of minority women who are already grappling with racism and sexism, both inside and outside their communities. Both the social-ecological framework and the theory of intersectionality provide a structured theoretical lens through which to examine the scope of factors that warrant exploration in this study.

Cultural Contexts of Domestic Violence

The following research is separated into three separate substreams: research on Russian women, research on African American women, and research on Hispanic women. Within each substream is research literature that describes the individual/micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems that shape and influence the identities and experiences of battered women within these specific communities.

Russian community. A Russian proverb has it that "the beating man is a loving man" and has also been translated as "the one he beats is the one he loves" (Seward, 1995). This quote aptly reflects how domestic violence is viewed in Russian culture. For centuries, a traditional patriarchal family structure has dominated: The socialization of Russian girls and boys has reinforced the traditional gender roles of such a patriarchal structure (Cubbins & Vannoy, 2005). Russian folklore and literature promoted the belief that Russian women possessed magical powers and were sinful. Due to this portrayal of women as evil, a household manual called the *Domostroi* was distributed to Russian families that "dictated that women were to devote themselves solely to domestic duties, and men were responsible for physically disciplining wives who disregarded their duties" (Horne, 1999, p. 56). Until the late 19th century, when a Russian woman was married, her father would physically pass a whip to the bride's soon-to-be husband as a symbolic

gesture that discipline and control of the wife was now the responsibility of the husband (Horne, 1999). Until the rise of the Soviet Union, a woman's identity and place in the social strata was defined by her husband's position in society (Horne, 1999).

Under Communist rule, in the 1920s, the Soviet Union's constitution stipulated gender equality, and provisions were made for daycare, maternity leave, abortion, and a woman's right to divorce her spouse. In addition, women were expected to work full-time beside their male counterparts. However, even with equal economic opportunity, women were expected to work full-time and to adhere to traditional gender roles as defined by the *Domostroi* (Pollard, 2009). Because of the Soviet Union's support of gender equality, in 1930 Stalin declared that women were now fully emancipated and that therefore no special representation or treatment was needed for them. While it is believed that domestic violence was occurring during Stalin's reign and the existence of the Soviet Union, crime statistics were withheld, and thus there are virtually no statistics available on the prevalence of domestic violence during this period (Horne, 1999).

It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 that data on domestic violence in Russian society began to emerge; however, it was also clouded by the more pressing concerns about the economic hardship that Russians had begun to experience. Unemployment began to surge, and in response the Russian government pushed women out of the labor market by encouraging them to stay home and raise families. The result was that women became increasingly economically dependent on their husbands and the traditional gender roles that the former Soviet Union claimed to have eliminated returned and were being reinforced by the new social structures (Cubbins & Vannoy, 2005). Furthermore, even if a woman is able to leave her husband, due to major housing

shortages in Russia, few women have options when seeking alternative housing. It is not uncommon for a divorced Russian couple to continue to share the same living space even when domestic abuse is present (Horne, 1999).

Arguments exist that domestic violence was never a problem until the Soviet Union fell and economic instability ensued. However, given the statistics that have emerged, there is reason to believe that domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. According to Amnesty International in 2005, every hour a Russian woman was killed by a relative, a former partner, or a current partner (Amnesty International, 2005). An estimated 14,000 Russian women were murdered every year, on average, by their intimate partners, and according to independent researchers, these incidents were considered to be grossly underreported (Amnesty International, 2005). To provide some context, in the U.S. on average 1,000 to 1,600 women are murdered by their intimate partners annually (Websdale, 2003).

According to one study, in Russia husbands with the lowest education and income and husbands with the highest education and income are less likely to abuse their wives. In addition, husbands who are unemployed or have wives who earn more than they do are less likely to abuse their wives, which seems counterintuitive, considering traditional gender roles in Russian society. The study revealed that the highest levels of abuse occurred among employed Russian men in low- and middle-skilled occupations in which working conditions were suboptimal. This study also found that unlike in the U.S., age and relationship length were not predictors of domestic violence in Russian culture (Cubbins & Vannoy, 2005).

One of the most significant contributors to the prevalence of domestic violence in Russian society is the complete absence of legal recourse for victims. To date, there are no laws prohibiting a husband from physically abusing his wife. Although numerous attempts have been made since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has not adopted any specific laws to protect women from abuse at the hands of their intimate partners (Misner-Pollard, 2009). Part of this attempt to address domestic violence came in the early 1990s, when the feminist movement started to emerge with the support of transnational donors and Western activists. By 2000 Russia had more than 200 nongovernmental organizations (NGO) providing services and support to women living with domestic violence (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013).

In 2000 Vladimir Putin came to power as the new president of the Russian Federation. Under Putin, the male notion of masculinity, as defined by strength, power, and sexual aggression, seeped into the public through national media campaigns. Putin returned to the traditional, pre–Soviet Union view of the Russian man, which focused on gender differences and the view that men are the protectors and women are the ones in need of protection (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013). Under Putin "the gender lens suggests that Russia's move toward authoritarianism over the past decade has been a gender regime change" (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013, p. 549). Putin encouraged women to stay home and have more children, while also encouraging men to devote themselves to and provide for their families (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013).

During the early part of Putin's second and current regime, crisis centers began to engage more heavily with the government. In fact, feminist leaders of the crisis centers began to separate themselves from the term *feminism* in order to "foster collaboration

with local authorities and law enforcement" (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013, p. 553). Government agencies were assigned to monitor the work of the NGO crisis centers, and due to an inhospitable regulatory environment, non-Russian donor support dwindled by nearly 50%, and Putin's administration required any NGO who received foreign funding to register as a foreign agent. As the government became increasingly involved in the crisis centers, the social movement initiated by the NGOs was muted, and due to lack of funding, many of the NGOs that were founded by feminist leaders were closed (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013).

In the new government-run crisis centers, the messages to victims of domestic violence consisted of blaming domestic violence on the pervasiveness of alcoholism among Russian men and on victim provocation of violence. It was common for victims to be asked, when first arriving at the crisis centers, what they did to instigate the abuse, therefore blaming the abuse on the victim (Johnson & Saarinen, 2013). Law enforcement was of no assistance as well. When law enforcement was dispatched to a home, the police would not enter the domicile unless the residents allowed entry. Furthermore, the police often blamed the provocation of violence on the women and left the situation to be handled by the family, since they considered domestic violence a private matter (Johnson, 2001).

Among the police, judges, and state social workers, there was a belief that the mission of any family crisis center should be to keep families together, whether or not domestic violence is present. Within the legal system, prosecutors believed that "woman battery is not a crime of their concern" (Johnson, 2001, p. 157) because there was a difference between a public and a private crime. Victims of a private crime such as

domestic violence have to hire their own prosecutors, conduct their own investigations, and seek justice on their own. If the cases managed to go to trial, which some did if the battery was severe or if the woman pursued justice aggressively, justifying the violence based on provocation from the victim was an effective defense. In Russia there were no restraining orders for victims to pursue, and even if the batterer is convicted, the punishments often included a fine and no requirement for the batterer to leave the joint residence (Johnson, 2001).

In the U.S., while domestic violence is illegal and women's rights are protected, Russian women who come to the U.S. for the purposes of getting married are subjected to similar if not worse situations than they were in Russia. The mail-order bride industry is a lucrative business that exploits impoverished and desperate Russian women by selling these women to men in the U.S. who can provide economic security and stability. Russian mail-order brides are marketed to U.S. men by "appealing to the consumers' belief that Russian women are both traditional and dynamic" (Chun, 1996, p. 3). Defined as commodities, mail-order brides arrive in the U.S. without a cultural network, family support, and few legal protections.

In 1986 the U.S. enacted the Immigration Marriage Fraud Act requiring any person seeking residency in the U.S. for the purposes of marriage to petition only after two years of marriage. This act trapped women for two years following their arrival, and if after two years the husbands dissolved the marriage, the mail-order brides were deported. In response to the backlash against this act, it was amended to allow for women to apply for a waiver for residency in the case of domestic violence. While intended to help mail-order brides, it did little to address the unique situations of

immigrant Russian women; the requirements that had to be met to receive a waiver were onerous, daunting, and unrealistic (Chun, 1996). Today the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has provisions to protect immigrants from enduring domestic violence; however, the requirements remain difficult to meet, and due to other factors such as community backlash and the risk of deportation, Russian women are hesitant to pursue social services. According to one Russian woman, "Americans look down on immigrant women from the former Soviet Union who come here to get married" (Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005, p. 951).

African American community. According to the United States Census Bureau, 13.1% of the U.S. population is Black, which I will refer to as African American in this section, and 78.1% of the population is White (United States Census Bureau, 2011). Because African Americans have such a low relative racial footprint, the statistic that an African American woman is more than twice as likely to experience severe violence at the hands of an intimate partner as a White woman appears to be disproportionate (Lee, Thompson, & Mechanic, 2003). Even with domestic violence being one of the greatest public health concerns within the African American female community, few resources are committed to specifically addressing this issue in a culturally competent way (Bent-Goodley, Chase, Circo, & Rodgers, 2010).

In order to understand why African American women are at higher risk for becoming victims of domestic violence, it is critical first to examine the historical background of the African American community. While slavery was legal in the U.S., slave owners refused to recognize African American marriages and commonly raped African American women. African American men were not able to protect their wives or

seek any justice and retribution, due to their enslavement. (Bent-Goodley et al., 2010). Even with the end of slavery and the emergence of equal opportunity for all U.S. citizens, the undercurrent of structural and institutional racism remains (Hampton, Oliver, & Magarian, 2003).

It is this undercurrent of racism that shapes the social conditions, the psyche, and the actions of both African American men and women. In the U.S., society is patriarchal, and manhood is primarily defined by employment, income level, economic independence, and the ability to provide for one's family. Due to longstanding institutional racism, African American males' ability to pursue the same opportunities as White males has been limited, resulting in chronic unemployment or underemployment, hindering African American males' ability to provide for their families. Living within a society that equates manhood with the ability to provide, have a good job, and earn a livable income, African American men are often frustrated and angry, which has lead to them directing their feelings of rage and impotence toward their intimate partners (Hampton et al., 2003).

Because of high unemployment and underemployment, African American men more frequently live in poverty and are dependent on welfare versus their White counterparts. African American males that fall within this socioeconomic category commonly live in neighborhoods where violence is the norm, and with the emergence of the crack cocaine economy, African American communities have become increasingly isolated. Because of this social isolation, coupled with the lack of economic resources, African American men have resorted to redefining what it means to be a "Black man" (Hampton et al., 2003). Toughness in their interactions with other men and exploitation

of women have become a means of compensating for their inability to attain the badges of conventional manhood (Hampton et al., 2003). This inability to construct an identity upon the same foundation as White men is a major cause of conflict between African American men and women and has lead to the prevalence of domestic violence within the African American community. Within lower-class African American communities, idleness and frustration often leads men to drink, use drugs, and pursue women to demonstrate their sexual prowess:

> African American men who are frustrated by virtue of their exposure to historical and contemporary patterns of racial and gender oppression, and who in response to such oppression adopt manhood roles that condone resorting to violence as a means of resolving disputes, are at increased risk of committing acts of intimate partner violence. (Hampton et al., 2003, p. 541)

Another contributing factor to African American males' propensity to commit domestic violence is the stereotype of the African American woman. In a study conducted by Gillum (2002), 221 African American males were queried about their views of African American women and the justification of domestic violence toward them. Two major stereotypical categories emerged: the matriarch and the jezebel. The matriarch is the overly aggressive, unfeminine, male-looking, physically large, very dark-skinned woman who emasculates African American men with her verboseness and her loud, assaultive voice. The jezebel is the sexually aggressive, easily aroused "whore" who is seductive, hypersexual, and an exploiter of men's weaknesses. Among those studied, 48% of the men believed in the jezebel stereotype, 71% endorsed the matriarch

stereotype, and 33% endorsed both. A significant positive correlation existed between upholding these stereotypes and justifying domestic violence, especially against women fitting the jezebel stereotype (Gillum, 2002; Hampton et al., 2003). Furthermore, the mass media also contribute to the visual images of African American women as either matriarchs or jezebels, further perpetuating the stereotypes (Gillum, 2002). Interestingly, many African cultures are historically matrifocal, so the negative reaction to the matriarch could be interpreted as a result of a cultural clash between African cultural history and the macrosystem White male patriarchal structures that define the society in which African American males live (Hampton et al., 2003).

Stereotypes that distort the images of African American men and women have defined racial ideologies in such a way that African American women resist seeking help for their circumstances (Hampton et al., 2003; Nash, 2005). In a survey conducted by Gillum (2008) of African American female survivors of domestic violence, it was revealed that African American women perceive themselves as protectors of African American men. Some African American women opt to relinquish power in their homes and to endure the abuse in an effort to restore their partner's manhood (Nash, 2005). As one of the survey participants stated,

> There are so many [Black men] there [in prison] already. So if we speak out and say, "he beat me," then you are putting them in the penal system . . . [So] you don't tell! If you tell you are putting a Black man in the system. If I told on [sic] that means that the criminal just system would be brought into play. That means another Black man would be put into the criminal justice system. And it's your fault. (Nash, 2005, p. 1428)

Many African American women feel compelled to avoid contributing to the racial stereotype that African American men are violent and are bad husbands. As one participant stated, when asked about when she decided to report her victimization to law enforcement, “for the Black woman who lives with abuse, the strain of being battered and the possibility of being subjected to social stigma for betraying the race are salient considerations as she contemplates how to manage being battered” (Hampton et al., 2003, p. 549). Furthermore, within the African American community, being a single mother is stigmatized, another factor for women to consider when deciding whether to seek help. In other words, African American women are forced to weigh the cultural implications of reporting their abuse (Hampton et al., 2003; Nash, 2005).

The undercurrent of racism that is both overt and covert in U.S. society plays a significant role in how African American women interpret and react to their abusive situations. African American women encounter racism within the legal system; specifically, they are more likely to be arrested along with their abusers especially if they defended themselves against their attackers (Gillum, 2008). Many women feel as if their only recourse is to defend themselves because they do not believe they have any other options. Unlike White women, who are thought to be engaging in self-defense, when African American women defend themselves, they are frequently viewed by the legal system as being the matriarch stereotype who instigates fights and is verbally abusive and aggressive (Gillum, 2002; Gillum, 2008). Thus, African American women leave their homes, where they are victimized, only to be further victimized by the systems that are supposed to protect them.

African American women also encounter domestic violence programs meant for the "universal woman," that is, biased toward the battered White female. The programs they encounter are often staffed by predominantly White women who lack an understanding of the African American woman's specific struggles with domestic violence. In a study by Gillum (2008), many African American women felt as if they needed to prove that they had been victimized in order to receive services. Group therapy or counseling sessions that are lead by White women also limit African American women's ability to participate, due to a perceived lack of understanding and trust (Nash, 2005). Furthermore, many shelters do not stock items geared to African American women, such as hair and skincare products (Gillum, 2008). According to Taylor (2005), locating a safe environment is a major consideration for African American women who have escaped their violent environments. In it not unusual for African American women to encounter racism when seeking alternative living arrangements, and unless family or friends can offer respite, many African American women have few options (Taylor, 2005).

Family and spirituality are major sources of strength and significance for African American women. One of the primary considerations that will compel a woman to leave an abusive partner is the desire to protect her children. However, African American women with sons may fret over leaving their sons fatherless, further perpetuating the stereotype that there is a paucity of upstanding African American male role models (Gillum, 2002). Prior to leaving their abusers, African American women will often seek out their church pastors for guidance, with mixed results. In some cases, women encounter support and in others, pastors adhere to patriarchal traditions and admonish the

women for thinking about abandoning their husbands and breaking up their families. As one pastor advised a battered African American female congregant seeking spiritual guidance, "You are a wrong, sinful woman, go back to your husband" (Gillum, 2008, p. 48).

Throughout the feminist movement, women of color, especially African American women, have been often overlooked. The perpetuation of class and race neutrality, coupled with a singular gender-focused agenda, have obscured the challenges that battered African American females face (Richie, 2000). This separation of sexism and racism has resulted in few culturally immersed services specifically targeted at African American females and has strengthened the undercurrent of racism by pitting White feminists and African American feminists against one another (Richie, 2000). While the feminist movement has started to embrace the intersections of race and class, little action has been taken to demonstrate this new course.

Hispanic community. Hispanics comprise more than 16% of the U.S. population and are one of the fastest-growing ethnicities in the U.S. (United States Census, 2011). The Hispanic ethnicity represents multiple backgrounds, including Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and those from South American descent. Although each of these places of origin is unique, "some generalizations can be made drawing upon their shared Latino values, traditions, sentiments, and cultural networks" (Ramos, Carlson, & Kulkarni, 2010). For the purposes of this section, the term *Hispanic* will be inclusive of all people who were either born in these countries or who at a minimum, second generation, unless otherwise specified.

The rate at which domestic violence occurs within the Hispanic community in the U.S. is commensurate with the rate at which it occurs within the White non-Hispanic community and less than in the African American community (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In order to grasp domestic violence within the Hispanic community, understanding the historical context of Hispanics, especially those who migrated into the U.S., is essential.

During the 19th century, many people from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba migrated to the U.S. Cubans and Central Americans, who fled their native countries seeking political asylum in the U.S., were not greeted favorably by Americans. Dark skinned, and resembling Native Americans more than White Europeans, Hispanics were subjected to prejudice and racism. Furthermore, many who sought political asylum were not granted it and remained undocumented. The anti-immigrant sentiment that was rampant in the 19th century, coupled with racial discrimination, "hindered, challenged, [and] deterred [Hispanics] successful integration into the larger society" (Ramos et al., 2010, p. 212). Hispanic women were further marginalized within their own communities due to the longstanding patriarchal structure that enforces male dominance.

The terms *machismo* and *marianismo* describe the historical gender roles within the Hispanic community. The term *machismo* has both positive and negative connotations, since it represents being a provider and man of strength and integrity as well as being virile and superior to women. Machismo has long been considered the source of power imbalances within Hispanic relationships (Gonzalez-Guarda, Vermeesch, Florom-Smith, McCabe, & Peragallo, 2013). The term *marianismo* refers to the expectation that women be submissive and obedient as wives and mothers.

Furthermore, women are expected to sacrifice and suffer for the sake of their children (Kelly, 2009). In focus-group studies conducted by Klevens, Shelley, Clavel-Arcas, Barney, Tobar et al. (2007) that focused on domestic violence community intervention for the Hispanic population in Oklahoma City, research revealed that Hispanic males do not believe in female independence. Many participants, both male and female, believed that the woman brought on the violence by not being a good enough wife. As one Hispanic male participant stated:

> It's good that a woman wants to contribute financially so the family is better off, but that brings all sorts of problems that are 80% domestic. All because she has money, she becomes more liberated, more independent, contributes more than her husband does, and even yells at him or kicks him out. Women's liberation is the root of domestic problems. (Klevens et al., 2007, p. 149)

To this participant's point, in a study conducted by Frias and Angel (2005), it was concluded that employed Hispanic women have a 38 percent lower risk of being abused versus an unemployed Hispanic woman; thus while this participant viewed women's liberation as the "root of domestic problems" (Klevens et al, 2007, p. 149), the question that begs to be asked is what does this participant believe to be a domestic problem.

Devotion to the family, especially to the children, is central to Hispanic culture, and this tradition especially affects women. In a study conducted by Kelly (2009) that focused on how battered Hispanic women decide whether to stay in or terminate the relationship with their abusers, it was determined that "mothers in this study made decisions at the intersection of their mothering role with intimate partner violence, their immigrant status, their Latino culture, and poverty" (p. 294). A Hispanic mother's vulnerability is compounded when she leaves her country of origin and comes to the U.S. Because of gender inequality and social discrimination, as well as the loss of extended

family support and an inability to speak English, battered Hispanic women are forced to balance multiple risk factors when deciding whether or not to terminate the relationship (Kelly, 2009). When Hispanic women opt to stay in the relationship, many healthcare providers, advocates, and social workers view this choice as passivity or weakness rather than a strategic attempt to protect the children. This implies that a gap exists between how domestic violence advocates perceive the best way to protect children and how Hispanic women perceive it (Kelly, 2009).

Immigration status and degree of acculturation are significant factors that also affect a Hispanic woman's experience with domestic violence. Non-U.S. citizens are fearful of reporting their abuse due to potential negative consequences such as deportation; involvement of Child Protective Services, resulting in the loss of their children; and the general unknown of the American system (Frias & Angel, 2005; Ingram, 2007). In a study that focused on the effect of acculturation and the psychological impacts of domestic violence on Hispanic women, it was determined that "the degree of acculturation will play a role in the individual's emotional experience and expression" (Cuevas, Sabina, & Bell, 2011, p. 1448). Battered Hispanic women who are more assimilated into Anglo culture are more likely to experience higher levels of depression, anger, and dissociation. The researchers attributed this result to the fact that the more a Hispanic female detaches from her host culture, the more acceptable it is for her to display such emotions. In addition, the researchers posited that the acculturation effect may be serving as a proxy for the stress of integrating into Anglo culture (Cuevas, Sabina, & Bell, 2011).

The less assimilated battered Hispanic women are, on the other hand, the higher their anxiety levels are. According to the authors, anxiety is a more culturally acceptable form of emotional expression for women among Hispanics. The authors concluded with a recommendation that extent of acculturation should be taken into account when doing client evaluations in domestic violence shelters (Cuevas, Sabina, & Bell, 2011).

The studies conducted on the help-seeking behaviors among battered Hispanic women arrive at similar conclusions about perceived barriers. Consistently, studies reveal that Hispanic women with low levels of acculturation are less likely to report domestic violence (Garcia, Hurwitz, & Kraus, 2005; Ingram, 2007; Frias & Angel, 2005; Kelly, 2009). Non-Hispanic women are more likely to use both formal and informal sources of help in cases of domestic abuse (Ingram, 2007). Hispanic women, especially the less acculturated, are less likely to use available services due to language barriers, lack of familiarity, and deportation concerns. Puerto Rican women were found to be more likely to use formal services, since they are more acculturated and do not share the same immigration and legal concerns as immigrant women (Frias & Angel, 2005). Furthermore, non–U.S. born Hispanic women are displaced from their families and may live in fragmented communities, therefore further decreasing the likelihood of their seeking informal help from family and friends (Ingram, 2007). Displaced immigrant Hispanic women are unlikely to receive help from neighbors in U.S. Hispanic neighborhoods; the study by Klevens et al. (2007) revealed that neighbors consciously refrain from involvement in spousal disputes.

In summation, the three substreams offer insight into the lives of Russian, African American, and Hispanic women. Although the substreams are separated, it is clear that

male dominance and historical factors play a major role in how all three communities operate. Yet the battered women within each community have different reasons for resisting services or seeking help. The synthesized research in each of the substreams is intended to provide a baseline from which the interviews will be developed, as well as a way to educate myself as the researcher on cultural context prior to engaging with these defined communities.

Summary

During my tenure working with a nonprofit domestic violence agency, the most common reaction I hear from people when I speak about domestic violence is, "Why don't they just leave?" Of course, this is easier said than done. Although once considered the ultimate measure of domestic violence program success, and even today commonly believed to be the panacea for battered women, leaving the relationship with the perpetrator is not always the right option for the victim. Sullivan and Bybee (1999) write,

> This myth . . . presumes that the one and only option for all women with abusive partners it to leave the relationship—a view that not only ignores the agency of battered women themselves in deciding what is best for them, but also ignores the religious or cultural proscriptions many women face when making relationship decisions. (p. 43)

Many options exist for battered women living in the U.S., since federal and state laws prohibit domestic abuse. However, even with these laws, women are indelibly bound by other forces in their lives that severely limit, or completely eliminate, any options other

than to continue to endure the abuse. What appears to be a consistent theme across all three populations in the literature is that women tend to base their decisions predominantly on the micro- and exosystems. More simply put, the women in these communities put the needs of others in front of their own, such that they are willing to endure physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse rather than cause others harm. While sacrifice is certainly admirable, sacrificing one's physical and mental health, even one's life, will ultimately hurt those whom that these women are intending to protect. The literature in this chapter confirms that domestic violence is a pervasive, complex, national problem that cannot be addressed with a single solution; rather, the problem clearly warrants more focused research, especially on effective intervention and prevention strategies among marginalized and minority populations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed explanation of how an understanding of the unique experiences of and reactions to domestic violence among Russian, African American, and Hispanic cultures located in Sacramento County were explored and analyzed in a structured study. Since the 1960s feminist movement, domestic violence was predominantly viewed as a gender-based issue; feminist scholars "focused on abuse and violence inflicted on the universal woman regardless of their sociopolitical and cultural context" (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010, p. 1). Although gender inequality does play a significant role in the cause of domestic violence, race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomics, and social structures are also major contributors and must be considered when engaging in prevention and intervention activities. The helpless battered woman portrayed in the media and in public-service campaigns has been primarily based on the White middle-class woman, while a woman of color or from non-U.S. descent is often not portrayed, since these women living in the margins do not elicit the same sympathetic response as White women (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

In order to raise awareness and improve the outreach services that WEAVE provides to marginalized communities in Sacramento, the following questions were explored: 1) What is a woman's experience of domestic violence in the Hispanic, African American, and Russian communities in Sacramento County?; 2) How do the contexts within these communities influence the experience of domestic violence?; and 3) How do the individuals from these defined communities perceive accessing services offered by WEAVE?

In an effort to answer these questions, this chapter describes the transcendental phenomenological design approach chosen and the rationale for why this approach was appropriate. In addition, a description of the population, the site(s), and access to the site(s) is included. Details on the methods used for data collection, analysis, and a timeline for these activities are included. Finally, ethical considerations are presented that were relevant to this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design appropriate for this study was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design. According to Moustakas (1994), "transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness . . . the challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings" (p. 49). The theoretical basis of this study was the exploration of the unique sociopolitical, economic, and cultural intersections that defined the contexts within which women of Hispanic, African American, and Russian cultures experienced domestic violence; phenomenology was well-aligned with this exploration since phenomenology's "objective is the manifest presence of what appears and can be recognized only subjectively by the person who has perceived it" (Husserl, 1970, p. 314).

Reaching women who are marginalized by stereotypes and biases, both institutional and cultural, as well as understanding their unique perceptions of reality, experiences, and background, required an in-depth exploration, with the objective of producing meaningful content to elicit empathy from the reader. By being able to identify with the victim's unique experience, domestic violence service providers may

revise their approaches and messages and extend compassion in a more genuine manner. Transcendental phenomenology provided a path to understanding and empathy by allowing victims of domestic violence to describe their experiences in their own terms and in their own settings. The path of transcendental phenomenology "is a rational path—knowledge that emerges from a transcendental or pure ego, a person who is open to see what is, just as it is, and to explicate what is in its own terms" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41).

Site and Population

Population Description

The populations in this study consisted of three primary groups: Hispanic, African American, and Russian. According to the U.S. Census, in Sacramento County's entire population is 65% are White, 22% are Hispanic, and 10.9% are African American (United States Census Bureau, 2012). My plan was to first reach out to community leaders of these defined populations and conduct preliminary interviews to better understand the populations and to obtain guidance on how to contact domestic violence survivors. Using referrals from the community leaders and leveraging my contacts within the domestic violence support community, I contacted survivors and requested study participation. Within each population, my goal was no more than eight participants and no fewer than five were to be chosen for the study. I used both criterion and snowball sampling to select the individuals (Creswell, 2011). Specifically, all individuals belonged to the defined population, were adult females, represented the interests of the defined population, were English speakers, were located within

Sacramento County or at least within 25 miles of Sacramento County, and were not current clients of the WEAVE program.

Site Description

I met the participants in their own settings, which were offices, community centers, and private homes. However, depending on convenience or other factors, I offered to provide a private conference room as an alternative location. This private conference room was located in a coworking business that I owned and managed in Davis, California. The conference room was private, quiet, and with few distractions. Public locations such as coffeehouses were also an option; however, this option was less desirable since privacy was a consideration and external distractions were a concern. Regardless of the chosen location, my objective was to accommodate the participants and meet with them where they were the most comfortable.

Site Access

Site access was not considered to be an issue provided that the site was in one of the three aforementioned locations. Another consideration was my personal safety when traveling to some of the locations. If I perceived risks to my safety, I planned to suggest an alternative location, such as the conference room in Davis. If the alternative location was problematic for the participant, I planned to bring my spouse, who would not participate in or attend the interview but would accompany me to and from the site to ensure my safety.

Research Methods

Description of Each Method Used

Interviews. My primary method of gathering data was conducting interviews with the community leaders and survivors in the Hispanic, African American, and

Russian populations. Using a semi-structured approach, I developed a protocol with questions that considered the social-ecological framework and intersectionality by specifically exploring the context in which these specific populations lived as children and in which they experienced domestic violence as adults. The interviews started with an exploration of each participant's social-ecological system as a child. I asked questions that allowed me to build a social-ecological construct for each participant prior to when she turned 18 years of age. I followed this with an in-depth inquiry about the participant's social-ecological system when she experienced abuse and created a social-ecological construct for that participant. The objective in gathering information about both the childhood and adult social-ecological systems was to understand how the interactions of the micro-, meso-, exo-, chrono-, and macrosystems defined the participants' experience with domestic violence. In an effort to answer the research questions posed by this study, understanding what was experienced (textural) and how it was experienced (structural) was the basis of the protocol questions. The semi-structured interview protocol could be modified, depending on the results of preceding interviews; however, acquiring the textural and structural descriptions was be the primary interview objective and modifications were not necessary.

In order to genuinely engage in an exploratory interview, I suspended my personal biases about domestic violence, especially as these biases apply to women of defined races/ethnicities with whom I interacted. It was crucial that I set aside my preconceived notions and interpreted the interviews through a clear lens versus one clouded by my personal, social, and political biases. I captured these biases in my

researcher's journal throughout the process, since I recognized I have some deeply embedded biases that I needed to grapple with as I proceeded.

Community leaders were selected using a community reference book used by the WEAVE crisis line and through my own professional contacts in the domestic violence community. As stated, I sought out survivors through referrals from community leaders and through my contacts within the domestic violence community. I contacted participants via telephone initially to establish contact. After initial contact was made, and if the potential participant was interested, we settled on a location, date, and time. When the participant and I met for the interview, I provided her with a statement of confidentiality, a copy of the informed consent, and written explanation of the study. I also informed the participant that the interview could be terminated at any time and rescinding agreement to participate in the study would be without any penalty. Furthermore, in the statement of confidentiality, there was a recommendation to pursue counseling if any of the interview questions triggered former experiences or caused anxiety.

The data was captured using a recording device. While capturing interviews both visually and audibly is optimal, maintaining participant anonymity was paramount. In addition, I took notes to capture key themes, phrases, and messages. My primary focus, however, was to listen attentively and limit any form of verbal and physical feedback in response to the participant to avoid influencing her answers.

Observation and field notes. During my interviews and as part of my interview protocol, I kept field notes containing my observations of the participant. Specifically, I captured information on the participant's affect, reaction to certain questions, body

movements and gestures, facial expressions, pauses, and emotional expressions. Within the interview protocol document, space was allocated to capture field notes on participant reaction to each question, which I typed into the document after interview completion. Furthermore, I captured information on the physical location of the interview and other factors that contributed to the outcome of the interview or influenced participant response. Sites that were representative of the target community were especially important to observe, since such locations contained symbols, quotes, colors, and/or religious icons that contributed to understanding cultural context.

Artifacts. Throughout the data collection process, I collected various physical items that informed my study. Artifacts included flyers, pamphlets, books, artwork, memos, and public postings. Artifacts were collected physically or copied onto a device and stored electronically. As written prior, when visiting culturally specific sites, artifacts collected that were representative of the community studied were important as I tried to understand and analyze the social ecologies in which these women live.

Data Analysis and Procedures

Within two weeks after each interview, I transcribed the interview and stored it in Dropbox as well as on my hard drive, which was backed up every evening. I did a preliminary review of the transcription by making notes in the margin, known as marginalia, that captured the patterns and themes that emerged during the interview that may have been forgotten after subsequent interviews. After all my transcriptions were completed, and prior to engaging in data analysis, I spent some time reflecting and writing in my journal about my experience with this particular community and once again, consciously and purposefully documented my biases at this juncture.

Data analysis began by going through the transcriptions thoroughly and capturing significant statements from each interview. This was the process of horizontalization, and from the list of significant statements, coupled with my marginalia, I clustered them into categories called meaning units. The meaning units were themes that emerged from the significant statement clusters. Such meaning units could be a single phrase or word; however, the meaning units needed to be descriptive and embody the intent of the clustered significant statements made by the participants. The meaning units were consolidated into a series of primary themes that emerged from each population.

Within each theme were the textural aspects of the study, specifically, a description of what the participants experienced, which included both physical and mental aspects. In order to interpret how the participants experienced domestic violence, I took into consideration the social ecologies or contexts within which the participants experienced abuse.

In order to interpret the abuse from the perspective of the participants, during my analysis I extracted the social-ecological data from each interview and consolidated this data for each population. From this consolidated data, I constructed a childhood social-ecological model and an adult social-ecological model for each population. These models became the basis from which I interpreted the structural aspects of "how" these participants experienced domestic violence.

After this process was completed for each population, I compared the primary themes and determined where common themes existed. From this, I consolidated the themes into a final set that represented all three populations. The themes were analyzed in terms of their similarities among the three populations and also where and why they

diverged. The reasons for the divergence were analyzed and presented as they related to each population's social-ecological models.

Identifying the similarities and differences among the three populations will help to inform domestic violence service providers in what areas program modifications may be needed. Furthermore, this may also contribute to scholarly literature on the use of the social-ecological model and its relevance in domestic violence research and intervention efforts. Finally, I was especially interested in just how different the experiences are between the populations, since this study may further justify the need for cultural sensitivity, or possibly, it could reveal that while some experiences are different, the experiences are not so significantly different that changes in domestic violence program service delivery are warranted.

Stages of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the following fashion consisting of three primary phases: Phase I African American Community, Phase II Russian Community and Phase III Hispanic Community. The table below reflects the data collection effort.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Timeline

Activity	**Date**
Complete research proposal	June 2013
Doctoral committee review and revision	June 2013
Proposal defense hearing and approval	June 2013
IRB Certification (approval)	August 2013
Field research: Phase I	January 2014
Data analysis	April 2014
Field research: Phase II	March 2014

Activity	Date
Data analysis	April 2014
Field research: Phase III	March 2014
Data analysis	April 2014
Draft of Chapter 4	May 2014
Draft of Chapter 5	May 2014
Response and revision of 4&5 with SP	May 2014
Completed dissertation draft to SP	May 2014
Revisions of dissertation (with SP)	May 2014
Dissertation draft to editor	May 2014
SP conferences with committee	May 2014
Dissertation orals	June 2014

Ethical Considerations

Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was required for this study. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, measures were taken to protect and ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The only identifying participant information provided was the community and a randomly chosen non-descriptive pseudonym.

As a former domestic violence crisis counselor, I was trained on how to handle sensitive subject matter and emotional situations. If any of the participants experienced an emotional trigger or became upset during the interview process, I was prepared to take

the necessary steps to provide assistance to the participant. Such steps included ceasing the interview questions, engaging in empathic listening, and providing service referrals.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, RESULTS, AND INTERPRETATIONS

Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand the unique experiences and needs of battered women in the Russian, African American and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County in order to raise awareness of the need to address perceived access barriers to service and reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in these Sacramento County–based communities. In order to accomplish this purpose, a total of 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted across the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County between October 2013 and March 2014. The interviews ranged between 59 and 123 minutes. Interviews were conducted only once, and no follow-up interviews were required, as shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Overall population sample and number of interviews.

Population	**Number of Contacts**	**Number of Interviews Conducted**	**Follow Up Interviews?**
African American	5	5	0
Russian	4	3	0
Hispanic	7	3	0
Total	**16**	**11**	**0**

The most common method for finding research participants was snowball sampling. Advertising in community centers and contacting community leaders yielded few results. The African American population participants were largely contacted

through snowball sampling. Within the Russian population, contact was established with a community leader who made several referrals, which yielded three participants out of four referrals. Finally, the Hispanic population was the most challenging community in which to establish contact. Four community leaders were contacted, and while these leaders were supportive of the study, none were able to identify willing participants. Of the three that did participate, one was a referral from the African American population and the remaining two were referrals through a colleague at WEAVE.

The interviews were conducted at multiple sites, including apartment complex meeting rooms, conference rooms located at the participant's place of work, private counseling rooms at WEAVE, my home, and most commonly, participants' homes. All participants completed the interview. Furthermore, none of the participants requested breaks during the interviews or refrained from answering any questions. None of the participants expressed that they were uncomfortable in answering the interview questions; rather, the women were notably open to answering the questions, and based on observation, did not refrain from disclosing personal details about their experiences with abuse. Finally, many participants did exhibit emotional responses such as crying and deep breathing as a result of the interview discussion.

The research questions that these interviews were intended to answer were as follows:

1. What is a woman's experience of domestic violence in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County?
2. How do the contexts within these communities influence the experience of domestic violence?

3. How do the individuals from these defined communities perceive accessing services offered by WEAVE?

What was determined during the course of the 11 interviews was that the semistructured interviews were capturing the data required to answer questions one and two. However, what was also discovered is that question three was an inappropriate question to ask. After the participants disclosed their experiences with abuse, which at times was an emotional experience, asking them about whether they sought services or what they thought about pursuing services at WEAVE may have been interpreted by the participants as accusatory. Many of these women still grapple with questions such as "Why did I stay?" and "Why didn't I seek help?" To ask questions about services at WEAVE would have changed the tone of the interview from one of nonjudgment to potentially one of judgment of the actions these women did or did not take. As a result, questions pertaining to accessing services at WEAVE were not explicitly asked. Three participants out of 11 freely volunteered that they did seek services at WEAVE, and they described their experiences. As a result, the data collected for question three is limited.

The findings in this chapter are organized by population, and within each population broken into two primary segments: the social-ecological models of the participants prior to the age of 18 and the social-ecological models of the participants after the age of 18, when the abuse was experienced. For each segment, a graphic is presented based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977; 1986) social-ecological framework that represents the common social-ecological models of each population, followed by the presentation of data that supports each layer within the social-ecological model. Figure

4.1 below represents the definition of the micro-, exo-, and macrosystems within the social-ecological model.

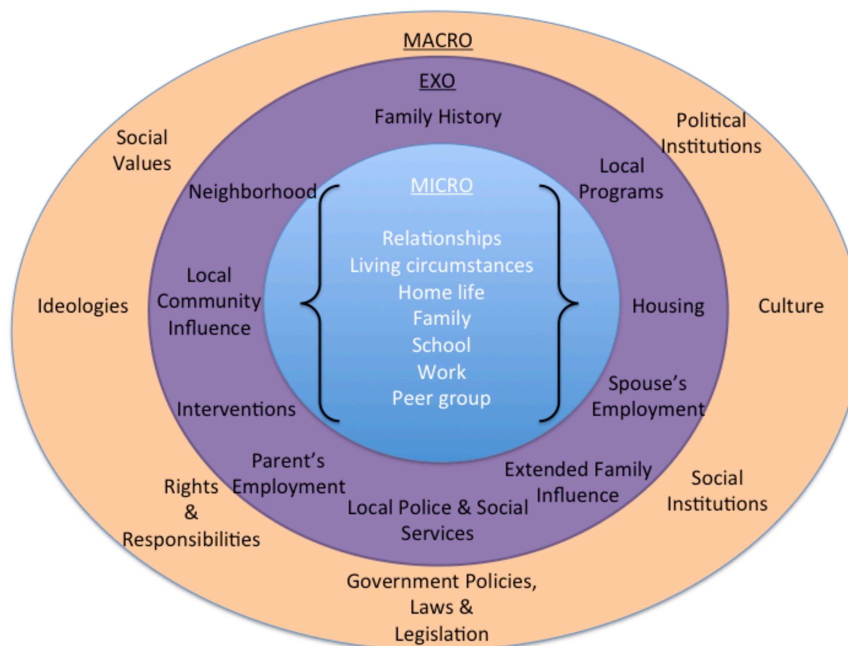

Figure 4.1: Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (1977; 1986).

Figure 4.2 below represents the definition of the mesosystem, which represents the interaction among the elements within the microsystem:

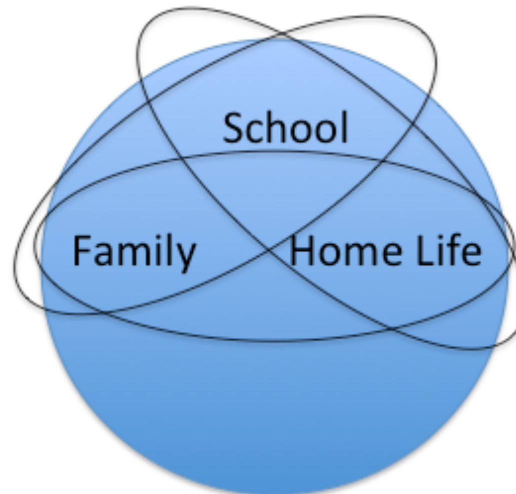

Figure 4.2: Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem (1977; 1986).

Finally, Figure 4.3 represents the definition of the chronosystem, which represents the normative and nonnormative/disruptive changes in an individual's life that impact the other four systems within the social ecology.

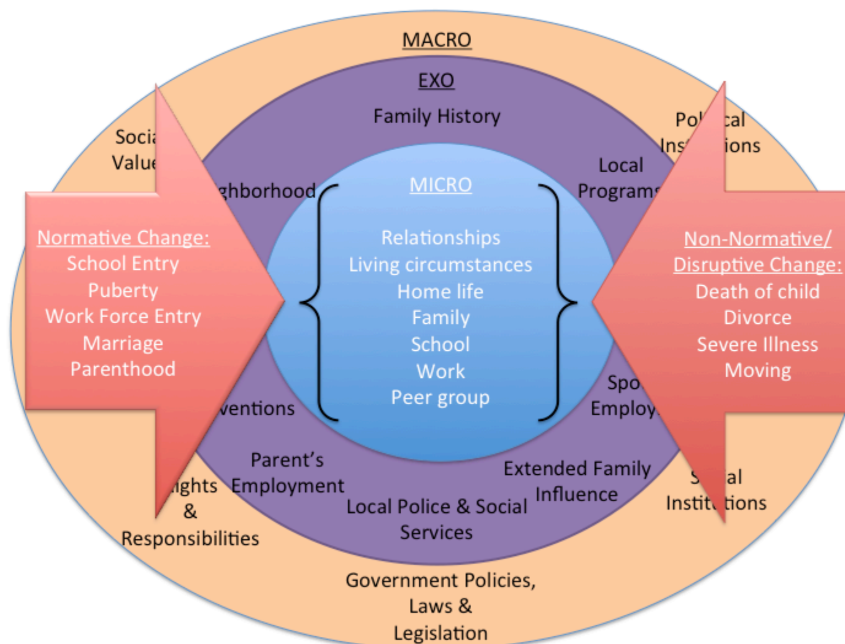

Figure 4.3: Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem (1977; 1986).

Russian Population Findings

A total of four participants from the Russian community were pursued, and three of the four were successfully interviewed. The fourth candidate did not respond. Contact was made with the Russian community through a Russian counselor at WEAVE who established a connection with a local Russian community leader. Because of her contacts in the community, she was able to assist in recruiting participants. Advertising was not used for recruitment in the Russian community, and all contacts were made through snowball sampling and referrals.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system in which the three Russian participants grew up (prior to age 18). While the three women had unique experiences growing up, this representation is intended to show the common findings within the population.

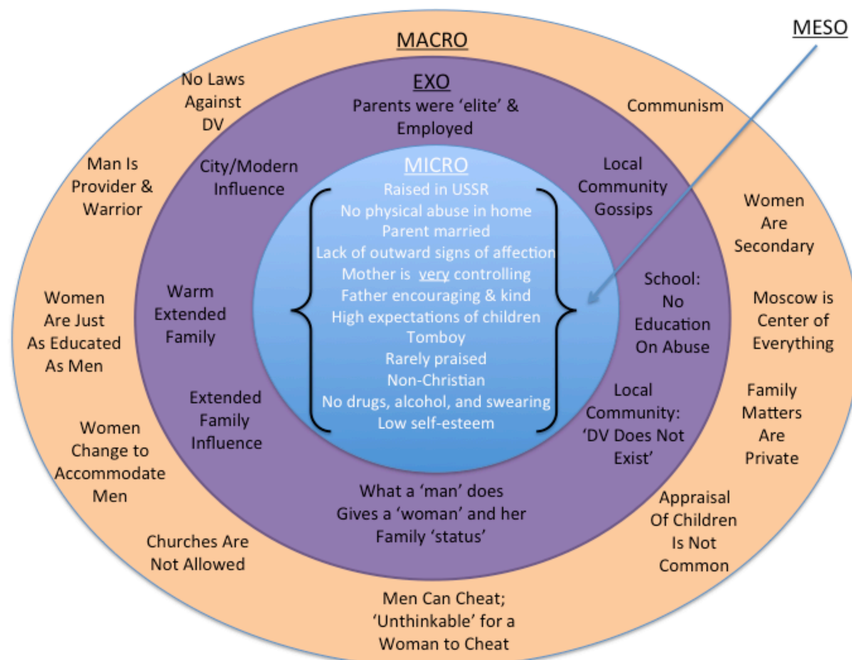

Figure 4.4: Common social-ecological system of Russian participants prior to 18 years of age.

Microsystem (< 18 years of age). All three women were raised in the former Soviet Union and in homes with both biological parents. A prominent finding in the microsystem was that all three had mothers whom they considered to be very controlling and not very nurturing. One participant stated, "My mother didn't know any better, how to show her love or her care . . . she thought that control is the best way to raise the child" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). Additionally, the women spoke of rarely witnessing any outward affection or warmth between their parents, and one participant

stated, "The most important thing is they never show any affection between them, they never show any affection to us, it's weird . . . not privately, not publicly, never ever" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014).

All three women led regimented lives in which education was a top priority, expectations were very high, and the women were rarely praised by their fathers and almost never praised by their mothers. It was customary in the former Soviet Union not to praise children regularly and as a result, two of the three women stated that they suffered from low self-esteem as children. There was a common sentiment that the women could always do or achieve more. Ara (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated, "I developed some kind of sense that I'm not worthy, I'm not too good . . . I could always be better . . . and I was also think about myself much less. I had very low self-esteem." In addition, one participant stated that she was not given any choice in what interests she could pursue: "Because we can only be musicians . . . not giving freedom of speaking" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014).

All three women spoke highly of their fathers, describing them as generally warm, encouraging, and kind. Lyra (personal interview, December 3, 2013) recounted what her father would say to her: "You're smart and you can do it." None of the three participants recalled any form of outward abuse in their home; however, one participant stated that she would consider there to be emotional abuse in her home: "But if we can apply American standards to my family, my mother was an emotional abuser" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Mesosystem (< 18 years of age). The interaction of multiple factors—living in a highly structured environment with high demands, scant praise, and lack of affection—

resulted in two of the participants having low self-esteem. The third participant believes that the demanding environment in which she grew up helped her to develop independence as she stated: "I understood if you are able to protect yourself, you will be able to protect your people whom you love . . . it was very, very good lesson for me" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

Exosystem (< 18 years of age). The exosystem among the three populations commonly consisted of parents who were well employed, and there was a common sentiment that a woman and her family achieve a certain level of status based on what the "man in the house" does professionally. The influence of their parents' jobs and working hard helped the women to "appreciate everything that [they] have" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013). Because of the employment status of each of the participants' fathers, working hard became a core family value and a minimum expectation: "If you're going to sit all the time, if you have money—you're going to all the time sit on your ass, you're going to have to lose your interest for life. You're going to have to get like bad person. Not in the physical, but your soul, morally" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

In the school system and consistent with Ara's quote above, there was no acknowledgment or discussion of domestic violence, what it entails, and the multiple forms it takes. As a result, Ara (personal interview, November 16, 2013) believed, "Men are always good because they treat me good all the time. I had no idea of abuse. I knew some girls were maybe mistreated, but it was never my experience."

The influence of extended family was evident, and all three women considered their extended family to be warm and kind. Two of the three participants grew up in

large cities where they considered their lives to be more progressive, and one of the three grew up in a more rural setting. All three referred to the local community as being prone to gossip and judgment.

Macrosystem (< 18 years of age). The macrosystem among the three populations was one vested in traditional Russian values and the influence of living in a Communist country. In the former Soviet Union, although women are equivalently educated to men, women are considered secondary and do not carry the same status or have the same freedoms as men. As several of the participants stated:

> The woman, she's subordinate as a person, not as worker—physically—maybe not suitable for hard work. But as a wife, you are second, not secondhand . . . but the man, he is more important . . . he's superior, she's inferior. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> Because it's never even conceivable . . . like women can go and do something on the side while they're married . . . men can. (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014)

> Yea, in that original country, woman was like secondhand. They didn't have their own opinion . . . like home animals. (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013)

The influence of the government was significant. Specifically, there were no laws against domestic violence or abuse between spouses, since any problems between spouses and family members were considered private family matters. In addition, churches were not allowed in the former Soviet Union unless government officials were present at the services. As a result, of the three participants, two were not religious and one joined a Baptist church that was not approved by the government. The Baptist church upheld similar values as the larger society; however, the messages of male dominance were reinforced through biblical verse. Ara (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated, "She committed the sin first, Eve. So it means her more vulnerable,

more deceiving, and more weak spiritually. So Adam has to take care of her, because if not him, she is so vulnerable to think lots of bad things. Do lots of bad things."

Chronosystem (>18 years of age/pre-abuse). The most significant and disruptive change for these participants was the move from the former Soviet Union to the United States. All three women came to the United States and moved to Sacramento with their new husbands. In addition, all three participants came to the United States with their parents and their in-laws.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system in which the three Russian participants experienced abuse. This system represents the commonalities among the three participants once they were married adults and living in the United States.

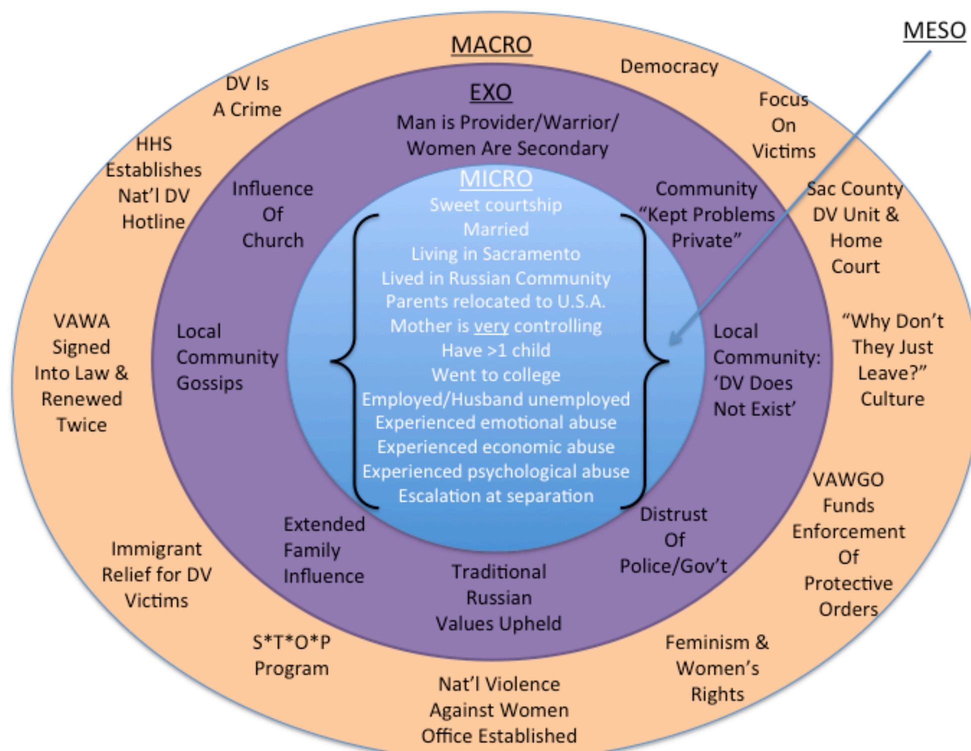

Figure 4.5: Common social-ecological system of the Russian participants over 18 years of age.

Microsystem (> 18 years of age). After the move from the former Soviet Union to the United States, all three participants relocated to Sacramento, California. All three were married in the former Soviet Union to a Russian native and came to the United States with their spouses. In addition, all three participants' immediate families and in-laws relocated to the United States and lived in Northern California. The women all lived in Russian-based communities, had a minimum of one child at the time of relocation, completed college, and were employed. One of the three completed her higher education in the former Soviet Union, and the other two completed their education in the United States at colleges local to Sacramento County. Two of the three women's husbands were not employed and did not actively seek employment.

During the courtship period, two of the participants saw no signs of abusive behavior. Ara (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated: "Premarital relationship was very nice, very gentle. He was a sweetheart and caring person . . . no warning sign for me." One participant felt pressured into marrying her husband because her mother approved of him: "My mom said, 'Wow! He looks like a good guy . . . wow!' It was peer pressure at that point to marry him" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014). Vela (personal interview, March 10, 2014) also commented that during the courtship: "He wrote letters, very sweet and nice, soft spoken and admiring." The third participant commented that during the courtship, "If you met him outside, he looks perfectly normal" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

The three participants commented on how the abuse began shortly after their marital vows were exchanged: "Got married, very next day, I did something—I don't remember what—and he started yelling and cursing at me. I'm sorry, maybe I did

something wrong so you yelled at me. I'm sorry" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). The abuse experienced was predominantly emotional, psychological, and economic throughout the term of the marriage, with the abuse escalating to physical violence when the participant requested a separation. One of the participants, however, was physically assaulted while married and pregnant. Two of the three women did not fight back either verbally or physically. One of the participants did fight back by throwing a hot cup of tea at her husband, resulting in her husband contacting the police and then Child Protective Services. Her husband stated: "My wife abuse me! She just threw a hot teacup on my head. Look at me!" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013). He did not sustain any burns or injuries as a result. None of the three participants sustained serious physical injuries, were hospitalized, or sought medical care for their injuries.

The three participants described their experiences with emotional and psychological abuse:

> I don't remember particular subjects about why he was screaming . . . it still made me feel very scared . . . I just was like a little child . . . I couldn't scream back. I don't know why. I don't know why. Deep inside, scars were staying there, especially after certain fights. (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014)

> Emotionally, he was absolutely sadistic . . . if I do or say differently, he's still not pleased. So, no matter what you do, you're wrong. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> [I was] bad, bad, bad. It was [my] fault, fault fault, fault. Only bad emotions inside of me. I felt so bad. (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013)

As mentioned above, the abuse escalated when the participants requested separation:

> [He] started controlling me when I first started to tell him I want to split . . . he gets *really* pissed. He [made] threats with money. He was checking my emails, answering on my behalf . . . blocking people from my Hotmail account . . .

> threatening me when the kids got bad grades in school. (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014)
>
> He told me, “If you decide to separate with me I’ll kill you. I’ll kill [the] kids. You’ll never ever do this. I will not let you do that. [We will go] to the Auburn hills and I will push you off the hills with the car and we’ll die together or you’ll die” . . . [he] put me up against the wall and yelling at me . . . he bit my nose. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)
>
> He pushed me . . . on the sofa and tried to have to sex . . . he already has one police report, and I go to the jail. He was pushing me to fight with him . . . pushing. (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013)

The children in the home witnessed the emotional, psychological, and economic abuse experienced by the participants, although the participants tried to keep it hidden. Ara (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated, “We tried to keep it hidden from the children, for me especially, it was very important.” Vela (personal interview, March 10, 2014) stated she “was watching always his mood when he comes home” to determine whether to take the children out of the house if she sensed her husband would become verbally abusive. According to the three participants, child abuse was not present in their homes.

All three women stated that they were the primary caregivers and nurturers of the children as well as the homemakers, regardless of whether the husband was employed. The women continued in their traditional Russian roles in addition to working. Lyra (personal interview, December 3, 2013) stated, “I was husband in this relationship. I was responsible for everything.”

Mesosystem (> 18 years of age). In comparison to the mesosystem prior to coming to the United States, the mesosystem that the three participants experienced went from one of structure, discipline, and predictability to one of volatility, instability, and stress. While expectations remained high of the women to perform in their roles as

mothers and wives, they were also expected to provide financial support in place of their husbands. The interaction of the multiple constructs within their environment was disruptive and caused many of the women to question their own sanity: "I thought I was crazy . . . everything I speak was wrong" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

As an extension of questioning their own sanity, two of the participants tried to make sense of what was happening in their environments by making excuses for their husbands' behavior and by reexamining their behavior in an effort to accommodate and please their husbands:

> People from outside probably make him feel tired very quickly. When everything is OK, he is OK. He is quiet, nice guy. Probably my character—if I would just act a bit differently. It's wrong with me, not with him . . . because of tiredness he was very easy to explode . . . I don't think he intentionally wanted to hurt me. (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014)

> He didn't have a good childhood, so maybe that's why. So I should forgive him. I should be more patient to him because he grew up in different environment . . . trying to find explanation to his behavior and excuses for his behavior . . . start to think what can I do to change, or better, just comfort him so he may be changed. I tried. It didn't work either. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

Exosystem (> 18 years of age). As a result of the participants' relocation from the former Soviet Union to a Russian-based community in Sacramento, the macrosystem that captured many of the cultural ideologies, social institutions, government policies, values, and traditional Russian influences transitioned into the exosystem. Specifically, the long-held value that women are secondary and that men are the providers prevailed in the local Russian communities. One of the three participants stated that she became tired of her husband not fulfilling his duties: "I am tired to live like this. I cannot live like this. I am a woman, I am not soldier. I am not like correctional facility. I am not mental institute to see and hear all [his] excuses" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

Even with the women working, the expectation remained that women were to fulfill their duties as wives, caregivers, and homemakers.

In the Russian enclaves in Sacramento, there was no outward recognition of domestic violence in any form that any of the participants could recall. The local community had a natural distrust of the police and government, and efforts were made to keep problems within the community private, even though community members were living legally in the United States. Furthermore, the local community was prone to gossip. As Lyra (personal interview, December 3, 2013) stated, "Who cares what kind of relationship you have? You shouldn't let people [know]—if they cannot help you, they can blame you, then can judge you." Because of insular nature of the community's exosystem, the local community appeared to have an "exclusive" mentality, meaning women lived under the persistent threat that if they did not behave according to the community's expectations, such as staying married forever, they could be physically, economically, and emotionally ostracized from their friends and family. One participant spoke about how the threat of community and family exclusion was a significant one: "[the] belief that without the support system, the person will vanish—be absolutely helpless" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). Two of the three participants mentioned that their in-laws and their own immediate and extended families would ostracize them in the same way as the Russian community if they attempted to separate from or divorce their husbands.

As a result of this real threat, none of the three women disclosed their abuse to their families or friends. In one participant's case, her in-laws were aware that there was abuse in the marriage and made no efforts to protect her or her children: "Everyone was

playing with me . . . that's why I kept everything inside of me. I didn't talk to my mom about this problem" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013). Another participant commented: "I kept everything from his parents, from my parents, from the outer world, from my friends" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). The third participant did not want to tell her parents because she felt they would not support her feelings: "My parents were biggest struggle—disapproval. What are they going to do? How are they going to react . . . I was always looking for approval from my parents" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014).

Because many members of the local community had fled the USSR due to religious persecution, the influence of the Baptist and Pentecostal churches was more apparent in the local community than it had been in the former Soviet Union, since organizing for religious purposes is legal in the United States. The result of this influence further emphasized traditional Russian values in the local community and solidified the value that marriage is permanent: "Church marriage . . . nobody marry to divorce . . . you marry for eternity" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). In addition, both the Russian Baptist and Pentecostal churches in this community continued to support the belief that women were prone to sin: "Women are viewed as the seducing people, people who bring sin to the man . . . so you see, women are kind of evilish creatures" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Upon separation, the three participants experienced various forms of isolation from their families, friends, and community. One participant stated the following about her parents, specifically her mother: "They almost not talk to me. [My mom] talked to me, but only [to tell me] she hated the decision, she thought that I'm wrong" (Vela,

personal interview, March 10, 2014). Another participant stated that her husband told a local sheriff in the Russian community that his wife left him for various untrue reasons:

> I abandoned the kids, I left for a man, I became a prostitute. I'm using drugs. All of that he said about me. He told the sheriff and [the sheriff] believed my husband right away. He didn't even think it could be a different story . . . [the sheriff believed] I became uncontrollable, I left kids, I went to have affair with a man . . . I want to put [my husband] in jail, because the law is protecting women, and because [her husband was] sure, [the sheriff] will help [the husband]. It's evil women. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

Because of her husband's statements, she was ostracized her from the community, and her mother complained of suffering embarrassment and shame in the Russian community: "She's blaming me [saying], 'How could you? I understand he is not such a good man, why did you do that? It could be different way.' She was blaming me" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

The third participant put a restraining order on her husband and experienced backlash from his family: "At first, I just felt myself like victim and then after I [put a] restraining order on him, his family, they all got mad at me. They all really want . . . to screw me up" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

Of the three participants, one accessed services at WEAVE when she first separated from her husband. She described being homeless and in desperate need of respite. When she contacted the WEAVE crisis line, she was advised to speak with an interpreter, although she felt she could adequately speak and understand English. She had reservations about speaking with an interpreter, since the interpreter was likely to be part of the local Russian community: "So, in this interpreter, even so she promise to be confidential no matter what, if she knows the story, the whole community will know tomorrow. And I'm not ready for that" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

The peer counselor continued to ask if she needed an interpreter, and this angered the participant: "[I was] so angry because it means that maybe I'm stupid . . . or she maybe think that I don't know what I want or I don't know why" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). The peer counselor then recommended that the participant seek legal services, and the participant responded, "No, I don't need that, because I don't know if I want a divorce or not" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). What the participant stated she needed at that time was "some kind of lead advice, what the best for me to do now . . . she just gave me a brief explanation of services WEAVE provides. I don't need that, I need something different." The call ended and as the participant stated, "So I should take care of myself, I'm thinking, as usual" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). She did not access WEAVE services again.

Macrosystem (> 18 years of age). The three women entered the macrosystem when they relocated during a pivotal time in the history of domestic violence in the United States. Not only had these women entered a country where there were movements to advocate for women's rights, but during the early to midnineties the first Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law as part of the Violence Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The law required states to establish a coordinated community response to domestic violence by bringing jurisdictions together to share experience and information to enhance community response to domestic violence. VAWA also strengthened federal penalties, provided additional funding to enforce victim's protective orders, and provided legal relief for battered immigrants who sought police or social services. Also included in VAWA were financial grants to states to provide the Services*Training*Officers*Prosecutors program (STOP), which trained

both law enforcement and prosecutors in how to handle domestic violence cases and work with victims of trauma (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

During the midnineties, the Violence Against Women Grants Office (VAWGO) was established by the Department of Justice to provide grants to programs that funded victims' services and allowed women to seek civil rights remedies for gender-related crimes. VAWGO also funded grants that encouraged arrest policies for domestic violence. Finally, VAWGO funded the first National Domestic Violence Hotline in 1996, which received more than 4,826 calls in the first month of operation. By the year 2000, when VAWA was resigned, new programs were offered that included expanding battered immigrants' access to immigration relief (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

In California, domestic violence had been a longstanding priority as early as the 1970s; however, it became a major focus in the early 1990s as a result of the O. J. Simpson trial and the death of Nicole Brown Simpson, who had repeatedly sought police protection against her abusive husband. In the midnineties through 2000, California state law developed laws that require:

- ongoing training of police officers on handling domestic violence calls
- arrest of abusers who violate restraining orders
- elimination of providing batterer treatment in place of criminal prosecution
- elimination of the option for civil compromise in which the batterer pays damages to the victim and avoids criminal prosecution
- notification to victims when batterers are released from jail
- creation of domestic violence courts to handle all domestic violence cases

- removal of firearms at the scene of domestic violence incidents
- mandatory reporting to law enforcement by healthcare officials if domestic violence is suspected and/or reported by a patient

State funding for local shelters dramatically increased from less than $10 million to approximately $17 million in 2001, and the marriage license fee also generated approximately $6 million annually for California-based shelters (California Senate Office of Research, 2003).

With the increased focus at both the federal and state levels, Sacramento County's district attorney created a Domestic Violence Unit in 1988 that focused on vertical prosecution and victim advocacy. With the receipt of an arrest policies grant from VAWGO in 1998, Sacramento County was able to establish a Domestic Violence Home Court in which the prosecutors, judges, public defenders, and probation officers are specially trained in handling domestic violence cases. In addition, the Domestic Violence Unit and the Domestic Violence Home Court were established to improve criminal justice personnel's sensitivity to and protection of victims (Miller, 2003).

Amid the legislation at the federal, state, and county levels, the focus was now on protecting victims, their children, and their rights. While the culture of "why don't they just leave" remained, significant strides were made to change the victim-blaming and "it's-a-private-family-matter" mentality. Clearly, the macrosystem these three participants entered stood in stark contrast to the one they had just exited.

Chronosystem (> 18 years of age). Among the three participants, the most significant disruptive changes they encountered were the experience of abuse, leaving the abusive relationship, and the persecution they experienced from their communities,

immediate families, and in-law families when they left their abusers. The experience of being abused caused similar emotional reactions in each of the three participants:

> Something really abnormal [is] happening here. Remember feeling that I have to, I have to, I have to do that. I was really, really scared. Didn't have the feeling that I have the right to do anything I want. I didn't feel like an adult. (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014)

> You're kind of like on a spaceship or like on a ship. So you should work things out, because there's no escape. I'm always tired, always kind of drained. I don't react as I want . . . I customize myself to what he wants. When you're on this ship and there is an ocean around you, you feel trapped. The more I thought about it, the more I felt dark inside . . . hopeless inside. This couldn't be happening. (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> Pushing, pushing, like trailer. Push, push, push, push . . . like forklift but I finally, I just got tired . . . I don't see any result. (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013)

Each of the three participants reached a point in their marriages when they decided they could tolerate the abuse no longer. One participant stated, "All the sacrificing has to have a purpose. If my death or sacrificing would not bring any good to him or to my kids, so why I'm doing this? Maybe I have the right to be happy and energetic and joyful and free" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013). One participant told her husband, "When I stay with you, I feel myself degrade. I just, I'm going down, down from this ladder . . . I decided to change my life . . . not stay like this. Otherwise I wanted to get crazy" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013).

The three participants all described their thought process in leaving as including the desire for a better life for their children. One participant stated, "I strongly believe that my happiness will positively affect my kids" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014). Another participant was concerned that her oldest son was starting to act similarly to her husband: "[My son] was copying his father, even his tone and his kind

of manner of talk. And it was not good. How if [my son] thinks it's the only way you can walk and talk and behave and treat people? How will he build his family?" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Upon separation from their abusers, the three participants all experienced lack of support and blame for the breakup of their marriage to different degrees, as described in the exosystem. One participant stated, "Parents were biggest struggle—disapproval . . . parents' reaction hurt me a lot because it feels like they never understand my pain" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014). Another participant stated that the response in the Russian community was, "Can you believe this woman? She left, she divorced, she became such a sinner, such a bad person. One hundred percent I was to blame. I was the bad person" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Russian Population: Now. The most salient points in the three participants' lives now are the fact that all three live in their own homes, have full child custody, and maintain minimal contact, if any, with their abusers. All three women reported having a happier outlook and a renewed sense of joy: "I feel a lot like a person . . . I started to be so much more independent, so much stronger than I was before" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014) and "All my experiences shaped me who I am right now. And if I looked at myself, and I'm happy with who I am it means everything was for good. Nothing to regret" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

All three women are employed, one has earned an MA, and another earned a PhD. One of the women is married, another is in a serious relationship, and the third is not currently in a relationship. The two participants in relationships reported that their spouse/boyfriend is from the former Soviet Union but is not abusive in any form. All

three participants articulated that they understand the signs of abuse and will not tolerate an abusive relationship again, regardless of their community's and family's reactions.

Additional Findings. As referenced, the Russian community initiated community-networking breakfasts in order to build relationships between the Russian community and the greater Sacramento social services and nonprofit community. The breakfast I attended was on February 8, 2014, at the Firebird Restaurant in Carmichael, a city in Sacramento County. The woman who spoke to the audience described how the Russian community suffers from pervasive domestic violence and yet is one of the most underserved communities in Sacramento due to:

- perceived isolation (especially among Russian brides)
- fear experienced by Russian women due to lack of information
- language barriers/unprofessional interpreting services/interpreting services within the community can lead to gossip
- mistrust of authority
- shame and stigmatization
- lack of cultural competence

Her presentation confirmed this study's assessment of the current exosystem, especially as it pertains to the community's emerging awareness of domestic violence.

African American Population Findings

A total of five interviews with five participants were conducted in the African American community. The first participant referred three more participants to the study, and the fifth participant was referred to the study by a colleague at WEAVE. No advertising was used to recruit any of the African American participants. All five participants identified themselves as African American women.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system in which the three African American participants grew up (prior to age 18). While the three women had unique experiences growing up, this representation is intended to show the common findings within the population.

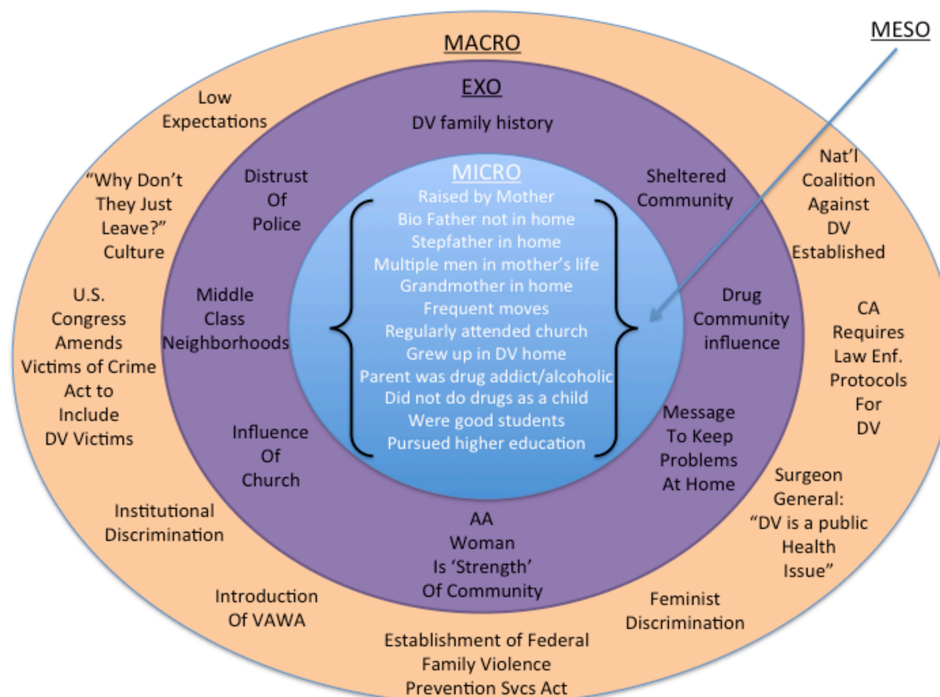

Figure 4.6: Common social-ecological system of the African American participants prior to 18 years of age.

Microsystem (< 18 years of age). All five African American participants were born and raised in the United States. Four of them were raised in California, and one was raised in the South. In all five participants' microsystems as children, the biological father was not living in the home due to multiple factors, including death, incarceration, divorce, and separation. Two of the participants had a stepfather present in the home, and three of the participants had mothers who were involved with multiple male partners throughout the course of their childhoods. Drug addiction and alcoholism were present in

four of the participants' homes, with three of the participants being removed as children by their maternal grandmother. These three participants were predominantly raised by their grandmothers due to their biological mothers' drug addiction. The three participants' perceptions of their grandmothers was that their grandmothers were strong and strict and wanted the best for their granddaughters. Of the two raised by their mothers, one of them felt she grew up in what they considered to be overprotective, loving, and sheltered environment, whereas the second participant experienced ongoing child abuse at the hands of her mother.

The participant who experienced child abuse grew up in a home where she was physically and emotionally abused regularly. The participant recalls, "Our friends had to intervene when she used to be on me . . . they would intervene and pull her off of me" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). This participant disclosed that she was not encouraged to make anything of herself, was often blamed for her mother's problems, and frequently was treated differently than her brother because she was more "Black looking." Her mother, who was Caucasian, would say to her, "We can't go in there because you're Black" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). This participant also was frequently in and out of foster care as a child and teenager. Of the five participants, she was the only one who disclosed any experience with child abuse.

Four of the five participants moved frequently for various reasons. Three of the participants moved as a result of being removed from their mothers' care, due to their mothers' drug addiction; they moved in with their grandmothers. One of these participants commented, "Moving as often as I did, created for me, this inability to connect with other children. I had better relationships with adults" (Andromeda, personal

interview, October 10, 2013). Another participant moved frequently as a result of entering foster care because of her mother's abusive behavior toward her: "I went in and out of foster care . . . I floated through the system, going back and forth between her and all the way up until I was about 14, 15." (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

Of the five participants, three grew up in homes where domestic violence was present. One participant stated she never witnessed the violence but was aware that it had occurred and was often confused that her father was never aggressive with his children: "Daddy never spanks us, but he is abusive to the women he is with? How does that work?" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). Another participant recounted witnessing domestic violence in her home as a child: "And have a look at my mom . . . she'd have a busted lip, black eye. I don't understand how somebody can endure this. Promised myself, you will never endure anything like this" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013). A third participant who witnessed domestic violence viewed the abuse differently: "I would hear the crying, the thumps against the wall. It was OK for him to hit her; he was taking care of two kids that weren't his and it was all good. And that was the way that I grew up, thinking that that's OK. He can hit me as long as he takes care of me" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Four of the five participants attended church regularly, and one of the three was heavily involved in the faith community. All five participants described themselves as excellent students who attended school every day and did not use drugs or alcohol during their childhood and teenage years. One participant stated, "There was a lot of trauma going on throughout my life and a lot of unplanned events, but I was still going to school. I still went to school and did the normal things" (Orion, personal interview, December

14, 2013). All five participants graduated from high school, and four pursued higher education. One participant described herself as "the smart Black girl" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). Two of the participants were honors students in high school, and one attended a prestigious Catholic high school, resulting in her being accepted at a top university upon graduation. Of note, the two participants who were honors students were raised by their grandmothers after being removed from their mothers' care because of the mothers' drug addiction.

Of the two participants who were raised by their mothers, both recounted their mothers working full-time. Of the three raised by their grandmothers, one commented on how their grandmother held a prestigious position in the community and was financially wealthy.

Mesosystem (< 18 years of age). All five participants experienced some degree of volatility and unrest in their childhood environments, whether it was the loss or absence of their father or being taken out of the home because of their mother's drug addiction. Amid this volatility, witnessing the strength and independence of their mothers, grandmothers, or other adults, these participants developed different degrees of inner strength and natural desires to succeed. Due to the healthy and positive interaction with a social worker while in foster care, one participant commented, "I was able to see that there was other ways I was given . . . there was a light at the end of the tunnel. There is another way. In the back of my mind, I had that knowledge" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013) also commented on the result of living in an abusive home and experiencing glimpses of healthy behaviors: "I had healthy relationships. I had good friends. Those that weren't,

I dismissed them. I wasn't one to tolerate much. I didn't allow violence or any type of verbal abuse going on around me whatsoever."

Another contributor to this strength was attendance at church and school. Four of the five women learned that abuse is unacceptable, whereas one learned that as long as a woman's financial needs were taken care of, abuse was acceptable.

Two participants reflected that even with the absence of both parents, they learned self-discipline, personal accountability, and refined social skills:

> I certainly lived the life of not having a mom and not having a dad and not having a parent for three weeks and needing to feed myself and needing to figure out how to wash my own clothes . . . and I still went to school and got good grades because I knew that was important for me. My parents weren't home. No one was saying, "Let me see your homework." (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013)

> You fit in when you need to be fit in. You're like a chameleon. So you can be in any situation, and you should know how to survive. [My grandmother] taught me some key survival skills with that. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

Exosystem (< 18 years of age). Four of the five participants consistently spoke of how African American women were viewed as the "strength" within the extended family and local community:

> The women were the strengths. The women were the nurturers. The women were the responsible ones. When you got hurt, you always went to mom or grandma . . . they provided the food, the clothing. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> Very strong, intimidating, very independent. That was what I knew of . . . self-motivated. (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013)

> Women in my family or administrators at school were always very, very independent. Very strong. Very confident women who did absolutely everything whether they were married or single . . . women, in my opinion, were the ones that went to work, took care of the kids . . . they cooked the dinner, and they prepared [the kids] for church. Women were the glue that held everything together in my world. (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013)

> What she says goes. That's the way my mom is. African American women were very much head of the household. (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013)

As a child, the fifth participant viewed women this way: "I think in that community as long as the man provided for you, you shouldn't have any complaints about anything else. My aunt is like that also. My grandma, my mom, [they] just stuck it out" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013).

All five participants grew up in sheltered, middle-class neighborhoods that were predominantly White. All five experienced some form of discrimination in these neighborhoods; one participant stated, "We ended up in a small town which had a lot of discrimination and prejudice. That's pretty much what it was like for me, I was trying to overcome the barrier of being a colored girl among Caucasians and trying to find my place" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). One participant had a positive experience when her family moved into a White neighborhood while she was growing up: "I learned diversity; it was something that I had not really been exposed to, but never had a problem with. I made a lot of great friends. It was good for me" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013). However, this participant did experience discrimination within the African American community in her neighborhood: "You do still encounter some things. When I say racism, I mean even within the African American community, the light skin, the dark skin, the long hair, the short hair, all of that" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013). Finally, one participant experienced overt racism while at a social function with friends; a White man there made a racial slur, and this devastated her: "I never experienced that before, so I'm crying because now I'm thinking, on my gosh, there's nobody else Black here" (Ariel, personal

interview, November 23, 2013). This was especially devastating for this participant, since she “saw no color” (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013) while growing up and had a diverse group of girlfriends.

Four of the five participants lived in neighborhoods with a drug influence or had family members and family friends who were participating in the illegal drug market within the local community. One participant’s stepfather was a drug dealer: “I found out, as I got older, that [my stepfather] sold drugs and he was a middle man . . . I remember one time he was gone for a very long time in my life. He had went to prison” (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013). In addition, the parents of this participant had numerous friends who were drug addicts. Another participant’s mother and stepfather started smoking crack cocaine when she was a child: “[My stepfather] had everything going for him. My mom worked . . . my dad was in the military, my stepdad. When they started using I was seven or eight and everything went downhill” (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013). While her parents were not selling crack cocaine, her parents’ habit resulted in other crack cocaine addicts coming to her home frequently: “It was almost like a crack house because everybody came to our house to smoke” (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013).

Three of the five participants were influenced by family histories of domestic violence that extended beyond their microsystems. One participant’s mother experienced domestic violence prior to the participant’s birth. Her mother’s history with domestic violence resulted in her physically and verbally abusing the participant as a child: “She encountered a lot of domestic violence and family violence in her life. She didn’t break

[the] chains. It didn't stop with her. She pushed them on to me. It was a lot of verbal abuse and it was a lot of physical abuse" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

Three of the five participants also commented on how keeping problems at home was a common message: "My mother was a big thing on not allowing the outside to know what's going on in the inside. Not allowing the outside world . . . you put on the pretty face, you put on the happy smile, and you don't share your stuff with the world" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). Another participant stated, "I never talked about what was going on at home. That was something that you don't discuss outside. You don't discuss that inside . . . because you don't discuss it, you don't address it, you hold it, and it grows" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

The influence of the church in the lives of four of the five participants varied. One participant stated, "You can't go to church and change. It doesn't change you. It's not your magic pill. It doesn't change who you are unless you work on the inside . . . if the beatings and the abuse is still going on at home, I don't care if you go to church or not" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). Another participant stated, "I went to church, but I don't remember getting any messages . . . I would be at church and I would just be sitting there, and I wouldn't be listening" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013). One participant was required to attend church every day by her grandmother, and another was raised in a very religious environment. She recounted what she learned there: "Situations and circumstances that you go through can be changed through prayer, so I learned prayer and those type of things" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013). Finally, a fourth participant stated, "[Church] was a safe

place. The message that I heard more than anything was: Jesus loves you" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

Macrosystem (< 18 years of age). As described in the exosystem, all five participants experienced various forms of discrimination. While this discrimination is expressed within the local community from the exosystem into the microsystem, the long-standing racism and discrimination toward African Americans was reinforced by the macrosystem. One participant spoke about how societal expectations for African American girls was low, and therefore she found herself often "struggling between the balance of being the smart Black girl and the cool Black girl" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). When she graduated from a prestigious high school with good grades and an acceptance to a prestigious university, her former elementary school principal appeared surprised. The participant recounted, "It occurred to me that [my former principal] had no confidence in my ability to excel academically. Even though I did very well in school. Even thought I had all GATE classes. His perception of me was like the rest of the little Black girls . . . maybe go to work at PG&E or Pac Bell or whatever" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). As a result of situations like this, Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) stated, "[I] found myself especially in my teen years needing to prove myself and go beyond when it came to people outside of my specific ethnic group that this young Black girl is very capable of doing some exceptional things if you just give me the choice."

Another participant who was predominantly raised by her grandmother spoke about her experience with segregation: "My grandmother looked White. I didn't. I really had firsthand experience with segregation . . . [my grandmother] was on that

borderline. She could be White or she could be Black" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013). The participant who experienced child abuse while growing up viewed the government institutions that were supposed to protect her as discriminatory: "White people get away with everything. That was my mind-set. My mother's White; she got away with beating me" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

During this population's childhood years, the macrosystem was beginning to address the fact that domestic violence had become a major health problem. In 1978 the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence was organized at a national level to bring attention to the problem of domestic violence toward women. As a result of this coalition and the work of feminist advocacy groups, the movement for addressing domestic violence as a crime against society versus a family matter to be handled privately was launched. In 1984 the U.S. attorney general established a Department of Justice Task Force on Family Violence, which was the first time in U.S. history that domestic violence was studied in terms of its impact on society. The report provided a series of recommendations, including enhanced police, judicial, and community response to domestic violence cases. Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the Family Violence Prevention Services Act, which was the first time that federal funds were used to help support programs serving battered women and children. In 1988 the Victims of Crime Act was amended to require states to provide victim compensation programs to victims of domestic violence, and in the early nineties, the Violence Against Women Act was being championed by a U.S. senator named Joseph Biden (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

Prior to the surge of national recognition of domestic violence as a significant health problem, the State of California had been a pioneer in drafting numerous laws to address domestic violence:

- In 1979 spousal rape became a punishable felony or misdemeanor crime.
- In 1980 marriage license fees were increased, and the increase in tax revenue was used to fund shelters for battered women.
- In 1984 law enforcement was required to develop written protocols and provide training to police officers on responding to domestic violence calls.
- In 1985 law enforcement was required to give victims in writing the telephone number of the nearest shelter and other written documentation on services and legal options available to victims of domestic violence, and a minimum of 48 hours of mandatory jail time was required for perpetrators who caused injury by violating domestic-violence restraining orders.
- In 1985 the Office of Criminal Justice Planning established the Domestic Violence Branch.
- In 1987 law enforcement was granted the authority to issue emergency protective orders for victims of domestic violence, even when court is not in session (California Senate Office Research, 2003).

Although the domestic violence movement was gaining momentum at both national and state levels, domestic violence was still largely viewed as a private matter and not a social one, as evidenced by the three participants who talked about the

importance of keeping family matters private. This message was not only evident within the exosystem, but it was reinforced by the macrosystem and the long-held belief that women "should just leave" if they are being abused. The national and state movements for combating domestic violence were beginning to permeate the macrosystem; however, none of the participants recalled any of this momentum. While not explicitly asked whether they were aware of the domestic violence movement in the eighties, the participants were asked about their macrosystems during their childhood years, and none of them commented on the domestic violence movement.

Chronosystem (< 18 years of age). As described in the microsystem section, four of the five participants moved frequently. The participants described these moves as disruptive events. Three participants moved in with their grandmothers because of their mother's drug addiction and/or alcoholism, which resulted in these three participants experiencing more structured living conditions, higher expectations, and discipline versus their former living conditions. The fourth participant, who frequently moved from her mother's home to foster care and back again, recounted devastating events while in foster care that impacted her childhood: "being raped, sexually assaulted, molested when I was in foster care . . . by [my] foster parents" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

Three of the participants experienced the loss of their father at a young age, which impacted their lives in different ways. Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) commented, "[My dad's] absence . . . really affected me growing up. In relation to my dad, I remember there was a very large gap . . . and [when] he died, I was very angry and I can't really tell you why because that was a missing piece." Ariel (personal

interview, November 23, 2013) had limited interaction with her father and implied that she had negative memories of her father: "I have different thoughts or sometimes I thought they were dreams or whatever. [My dad and I] don't have a good relationship at all. He always wanted me to meet his new girl, but he always had a new girl . . . I really kind of shut my dad out."

Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013) lost her father to illness at a young age: "I only have a couple of vivid memories about my biological father, and most of them were of him being sick . . . ambulance coming . . . [my mom] became very strong, especially after my father passed." Cordelia's (personal interview, November 19, 2013), mother remarried, and Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013) shared that her feelings for her stepfather were positive: "I love him to death. He's very laid back . . . he just kind of goes with the flow . . . he's been very supportive. He was very comfortable with us and [my sisters and I] were very comfortable with him." For Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013), the entrance of a stepfather in her life was initially positive, but then it started having a negative impact when her mother and stepfather started using drugs: "My stepdad would beat my mom. They were on drugs. He would beat her. I would see her." Orion's (personal interview, December 14, 2013) mother had several men in her life: "Any men that ever would stay with us wouldn't last very long, [my mom] would excuse them, but I never had any issues with them for my part."

Another major disruptive occurrence in the lives of these participants was witnessing, and in one participant's case experiencing, violence. Three participants lived in homes where domestic abuse was present. The impact this had on their lives varied

from "I don't ever want that" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013) to "but if he provided, he had all rights to do whatever he wanted" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013). Experiencing physical and verbal abuse growing up damaged one participant's self-esteem:

> Self-esteem wise, it felt pretty low . . . it was really hard . . . for me self-identity wise, it was really hard to be OK with myself. It felt like I was constantly trying to win [my mom] over and please her because nothing I ever did was right . . . always walked on eggshells growing up. It was pretty harsh. (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013)

Three of the five participants gave birth to their first children before turning 18 years of age. The disruptive event of having a child as a teenager impacted the lives of these participants; the impact to the microsystem is reflected in the next section.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system in which the five African American participants experienced abuse. This social-ecological system represents the commonalities among the three participants once they were at least 18 years of age.

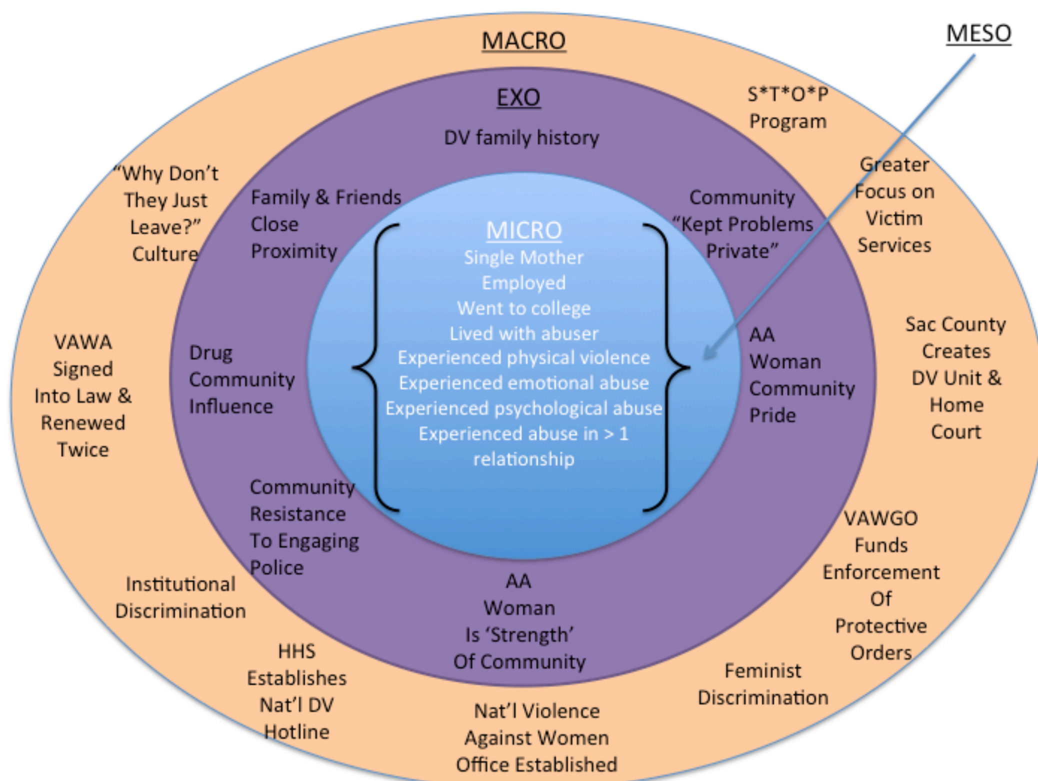

Figure 4.7: Common social-ecological system of the African American participants over the 18 years of age.

Microsystem (> 18 years of age). The five participants had various living situations. One participant had purchased a new home on her own, two were living at their boyfriends' parents' home, one lived between her mother's home and the street, and the fifth participant lived with her husband and then boyfriends at multiple residences.

All five participants were employed after they graduated from high school. Four of them were also going to college at the same time. During this period one of them graduated with an MA and began pursuing a doctorate.

As mentioned above, three of the five participants gave birth to their first child prior to the age of 18. The other two participants had their first child after the age of 18 and prior to the age of 25. One of the participants married the father of her child, and the

other four did not. Three of the five participants maintained full and sole custody of their children. Two of the five participants lost custody of their children because of their drug addiction.

For these two participants, drug use became a central focus of their lives. Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) believes she used drugs as a way to self-medicate as she grappled with her abandonment issues as a result of losing her father at a young age: "The abandonment came up. I medicated. I took pills, I snorted cocaine, I drank to make this pain go away." Both participants admit to being addicted to drugs such as methamphetamines, crack cocaine, cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol for an extended period of time. According to Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013), her resolve to not allow violence or abusive behavior in her life weakened when she became increasingly addicted to methamphetamines: "That continued until I started getting really deeper, deeper, and deeper into drugs."

All five participants experienced physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. One participant experienced economic abuse. Of the five participants, three experienced abuse in only one relationship, whereas two participants experienced abuse in multiple relationships for extended periods of time. Four of the participants commented on how their abuser asserted control and became the center of their lives:

> I wonder if he sat down and planned this out? He took very calculated steps to gain control . . . he was very specific about men not knowing where I lived that I always assumed this was his desire to protect me [because] he lived so far away. I felt like I needed to ask him for permission and who I could have at the house. I thought he really cares about me. It never occurred to me that I was literally being separated from my friendships. (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013)
>
> I thought he was a good guy, he was a sweet guy. We into a relationship. On my way to school one day he would just pop up in my driveway, take me to get

> breakfast and bring me things. But he was very, very controlling. Controlling to the fact of, who were you on the phone with, who picked you up at school, why this, why that. (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013)

> I really latched on to him, because of his family. He had this family that, they were always together. Everything was together. He was my everything. He cheated on me with one of our other friends. That was really traumatic to me because I latched on to him so hard. I tried to kill myself. I took pills. (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013)

> He controlled everything. Every aspect of my life, he controlled. I wouldn't come and go without him knowing my whereabouts. If I went to the store, I had to leave a note. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

All five participants described their experiences with physical abuse:

> And he yelled at me one day and I told him, I said, "I can't do this anymore." He grabbed me by my neck and choked me. It was—I couldn't breathe and all I saw was the devil when I looked at him . . . and he choked me again. (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013)

> He was accusing me of doing different things and I was just like, "You are crazy. Where are you coming up with this?" And I remember crying and I remember he choked me and he was like, "I'm not doing anything, you're the one who's doing this." (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013)

> My mom had just left. I happened to come right back around the corner and he was standing in the doorway. He had a key at the time. And he punched me in the face. He grabbed my hair and banged my head against the refrigerator. Screaming and yelling . . . I remember screaming and running to the back of the house where my bedroom is. I kept a large knife on the side of my bed and he stopped me dead in my tracks and said, "I dare you, I dare you to get it. I'll kill you today." And I froze. (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013)

> He went ballistic. He beat me unmercifully. I had a broken nose, a fractured jaw. The way I got there, my head went back, both eyes were black. After[ward] I tried to commit suicide. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> He's got me on the floor . . . I'm trying to get up and he goes over and he grabs this knife. He comes over and he puts it to my throat and he goes, "I'm going to fucking kill you, you bitch" and I'm like, "What are you talking about? I love you." Next thing I know he's back on top of me. He's choking me and I thought I was going to die. I was begging him and pleading with him and then I couldn't breathe. He turns around . . . I try to walk out the door . . . he grabs my other hand and just starts whaling on me. (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013)

In addition to the physical abuse, two of the participants described the emotional and psychological abuse they experienced:

> He was mean, very verbally abusive. "You will never be nothing. You are nothing. I don't want you." I remember those words use to sting. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

> After I left he was, "You're just disrespectful. You're just a horrible person. You do this, you do these things and I'm always angry with you because of your behavior." After that I began to get all these voicemails and if I couldn't call him back immediately, he would leave horrible messages: "I knew you were no good. I knew you were doing this. You're not in a meeting. You don't do shit when you're at work." (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013)

Only one participant experienced economic abuse; however, because of her fear of abandonment and her need for access to drugs to maintain her addiction, she was more likely to excuse her partner for controlling her access to resources. Her partners were able to control her through access to drugs, a car, and a comfortable home. As Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) describes it: "Come home, see your girls, and give me some dope. And it's OK. You can beat me, you could do whatever, take all my money. I didn't care."

Mesosystem (> 18 years of age). These five participants were all working parents and leading independent lives. Four of these participants were attending school while at the same time providing for their children. The interaction within four of the participants' microsystems resulted in a common thought process of bewilderment, rationalization, and to varying degrees, denial that the abuse was happening. For Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013), the abuse could not be happening: "This isn't it! I'm too smart! I know all the signs—this isn't me! What have I gotten myself into? I always felt like I would never allow a man to hit me." However,

Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) also struggled with what to do: "Do I really want to leave? I had been single a long time." Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013) reasoned that the abuse was not truly abuse: "This is not happening to me . . . this is not real. He didn't blacken my eye, so it's not abuse. If I did not say it, then it really did not happen." Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013) reacted with disbelief and examined herself for allowing it to happen: "What [am I] doing? What is wrong with [me]? Is this really happening?"

Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013), who had formerly stated that she possessed a "low tolerance [and] . . . didn't allow violence or verbal abuse," blamed herself: "I put myself here. I wish I had known. I knew better." Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) also blamed herself for the abuse: "You blame yourself for everything—in part, because your abuser is telling you that everything is your fault. Your esteem is taken away because you begin to wonder what did you do? You're always being yelled at. Everything would be fine if you just did x, y, z."

Because of this mixture of bewilderment, denial, and self-blame, several of the participants commented on how they rationalized their abusers' behavior: "He was frustrated at the moment; he wasn't employed . . . I was disrespecting him . . . maybe he's just stressed" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). After punching her in the face, Orion's (personal interview, December 14, 2013) abuser apologized, and she accepted the apology because she believed, "Maybe they'll change. Got to give people a chance." Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013), accepted the abuse as part of her spousal role, and provided that he did not terminate the relationship as well as visits to his children, she was able to rationalize staying in an abusive situation: "I was

his wife and it was OK. And as long as you don't leave me and divorce me, it's OK. And as long as you take care of your children. Just don't leave me by myself. Do whatever you want to do, but don't leave me."

Exosystem (> 18 years of age). Many the elements of the participants' childhood exosystems persisted, such as the family history of domestic violence, the understanding that African American women were the strength of the community, and that personal matters were kept private. All five participants kept their abuse to themselves to different degrees and for different reasons.

For Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013), the idea of being judged by her community was a factor, especially because she outwardly demonstrated strength and confidence: "That lack of confidence you have in yourself—turns into embarrassment and then your desire to not tell on your own people is what keeps us from sharing the information. I didn't want to feel judged. I didn't want to face the question of 'why did you stay?'" Andromeda commented: "I distanced myself so much from my friends and family I didn't have anyone to reach out to." Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013) also resisted disclosing what happened to her because acknowledging the abuse made it real: "If I would not say it, then it really did not happen." For religious reasons, Cordelia did not disclose it to her mother or to either of her sisters. The first time Cordelia spoke to a friend about it was five years after the incident.

For Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013), not disclosing the abuse was a result of the messages she received from her childhood exosystem. When asked if she informed her family about what was happening to her she said, "No, it was a secret. I

avoided everybody. Why was it a secret? Because the abuse that I had seen growing up was a secret. You don't talk about stuff outside your house."

Orion's experience with disclosure was different from that of the other participants. Orion's instincts were not to call her mother but rather to engage the police. Because of the influence of drugs on her community, the police treated her poorly when she contacted them after an incident in which she had been physically abused. She recalls episodes when the police responded and told her, "Let it go . . . just deal with it" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013) described how the police officers treated her as less important because she was an addict: "There's one officer, I'll never forget him. [He said], 'I'm so sick of these people and their fucking dope shit.' Guys bring this shit upon yourself.' In the back of my mind, maybe he's got a point. Maybe I deserved it."

Even after this one incident, Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013) contacted the police after she endured a significant attack by her boyfriend. In this particular incident, when the police showed up, they treated her like a criminal: "The cops show up. They treat me like I'm the criminal. Putting me down on the ground. I can either let it go or they're going to take us both to jail." The result was they both were taken into custody, where Orion learned that telling the police was more harmful than helpful:

> Crime scene came out to take pictures. They didn't even take me into a room. They did it right there in front of the whole sheriff station. They literally tell me to pull my boobs out and took pictures right there. All the officers are laughing. He's over there laughing with the officer. My privacy is shit. Who I am is shit. It's done nothing. What was the point of saying anything else, telling, saying anything? It is what it is. (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013)

Because of this incident, during a subsequent physical attack, which resulted in a serious injury, Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013) thought, "Maybe I'll call 911. In the back of my mind I'm remembering, 'Oh well, that's not going to do no good.'" After nearly losing her leg as a result of gangrene setting in, she still refused to tell the police based on her last experience: "I didn't file no police report. My faith in the justice system was shot" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013). As a result of this final incident, Orion sustained permanent damage to one of her legs and still has trouble wslking. Furthermore, these events corroborated Orion's childhood belief, which is that White people are treated differently from Black people. She believed her abuser was not prosecuted, and the restraining order against him never enforced, because her abuser was White: "If he was Black, they would have went after him" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

While Orion's distrust of the police was the result of a direct experience with the Sacramento police department, another participant had a different experience with engaging the police. Ariel did not consider engaging the police because having grown up in a home where drug addicts were commonly found, she was discouraged from engaging law enforcement was for any reason.

One of the participants did eventually reach out for assistance from both law enforcement and WEAVE. Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) put a restraining order on her abuser and was surprised when her abuser requested that a restraining order be placed on her: "If I'm being assaulted and I go file an RO, how does he get to file one also in the same county?" She found the crisis line worker she contacted at WEAVE very cold and unhelpful; however, she found that engaging a

WEAVE advocate to attend court with her to be “the best decision that [she] could have ever made” (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013).

Macrosystem (> 18 years of age). The macrosystem in which these participants experienced abuse was during the pivotal time in the history of domestic violence in the United States. As described in the Russian population macrosystem section for > 18 years of age, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law, and financial grants had been made to states to provide training for both law enforcement and prosecutors on how to handle domestic violence cases and work with survivors (Office of Violence Against Women, n.d.).

Sacramento County was the recipient of some of this funding, resulting in the creation of the Sacramento County Domestic Violence Unit and the Domestic Violence Home Court. This mission of this unit and court was to improve criminal justice personnel’s sensitivity to handling and protecting victims (Miller, 2003). Furthermore, pro-arrest policies for abusers who violate restraining orders and mandatory reporting of abuse by healthcare professionals were codified into California State Law (California Senate Office of Research, 2003).

Even amid the wave of the anti–domestic violence movement and the rise of women’s rights, institutional discrimination toward African Americans remained. In addition, the “why don’t they” culture was still a fundamental element woven into society’s belief system about domestic violence. The complexity of domestic violence, the emotional, physical, and psychological impacts it has on an individual, was still not well understood by those who had not experienced it. The pervasive belief was

simplistic: the problem will be solved if she just leaves (Walker, 1979, Sullivan & Bybee, 1999).

Chronosystem (> 18 years of age). During this time in the participants' lives, there were numerous nonnormative/disruptive events that affected their ecosystems: home life, work life, family life, physical health, and emotional health. As written above, two of the five participants lost custody of their children due to their drug addiction. Both participants described the loss of their children as the impetus behind their worsening drug addiction:

> Once my son is out of my possession . . . I didn't really realize he was my world. It was like somebody died . . . losing him. I was working two to three jobs at a time, going to school, and trying to keep him . . . and his dad would send me to court and I'd win . . . and finally, I gave up. It's like I kind of quit. At that very moment is when I went nose-deep into the meth (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013).

> My mom popped up one day. I was loaded out of my mind and she told me, "I'm going to school. You're signing over [redacted] and I'm taking my grandkids." Which she did. At that point, I gave up. I lost my relationship with my daughters, with my mother. (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013)

The incidents of abuse were also nonnormative/disruptive events that took place in the lives of these five participants. The affect on the participants was fairly consistent and framed their view of life and themselves. For Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013), it only took one incident to damage her self-confidence and outlook: "If you only get hit once, it changes your whole perspective on relationships . . . your confidence is stripped." Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013) stated, "[I was] broken on the inside . . . I was going to slit my wrists." Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated that the "physical relationships that were abusive and . . . drug-centered" made her feel dead inside: "You have no self esteem—not low—

no self-esteem . . . I was already emotionally dead, I just wasn't physically dead. I was on a suicide mission, not even knowing it." Orion's (personal interview, December 14, 2013), life was and continues to be affected by her experienced with abuse: "My integrity [was] so diminished being under the influence of meth that I allowed myself to be put in that situation. Not only physically did it leave me with lasting trauma, but emotionally. It basically made me disabled."

All five participants left their abusers at different points in their lives. The two participants who were drug addicts also rehabilitated and became drug free. The five participants experienced different events that compelled them to change their lives. For all five participants, the desire to protect their children was tantamount. Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) explained why she decided to carefully terminate the relationship with her abuser: "All I could think about was my son . . . I jeopardized my son's safety." Similarly, Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013), stated, "That's not what I want for my daughter." Similarly, Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) stated, "[I was] fearful for my life and my girls' lives." Finally, Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013) stated, "[I] cannot allow my children to see this."

Although children were a top priority in the lives of these participants and a significant factor in their decision to leave, they were not the main impetus for leaving the abuse. For Cordelia (personal interview, November 19, 2013), spirituality was the source that compelled her to change her life: "That reserve in me kicked in . . . I knew how to do things to maintain, to survive . . . I knew to read my Bible and pray." Cassiopeia's (personal interview, November 16, 2013) religious upbringing and spiritual

history reignited in her: "When I walked through the doors of the church on a Wednesday night, it felt like every chain and shackle came off of me. I wanted to live again. I realized that I was somebody. I was important, and my life turned all the way around." Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013) tapped into an inner reserve of self-belief when she terminated the abusive relationship: "I had myself. I was my cheerleader. I looked in the mirror. I told me that 'you are here to make a difference. You are here.' I think it was just the fight. You have to have that fight, that drive to say, I don't have to deal with it." Orion's (personal interview, December 14, 2013) final experience with violence and the injuries that she sustained gave her pause: "He beat me so bad that morning I couldn't go to work. One too many times not going to work, steal my money—it was all that power and control. I finally got a good job. I was quitting dope. I was trying to make it better, so I can work to get my son back and deal with things." Because Orion's childhood years were filled with violence, her former experiences with trauma became a driving force behind her decision to change her life:

> Part of growing up, I had family violence all throughout. It was no stranger . . . I had learned what was right, what was wrong, what was not OK, what was OK, what was healthy, what was not healthy. I've been educated on that before all this. That made it even easier to say "It's time to move on. It's time to heal over it." (personal interview, December 14, 2013)

African American Population: Now. None of the five participants are currently living in abusive situations or are in abusive relationships. Four of the five no longer have contact with their former abusers, whereas one maintains contact due to children.

Four of the five participants spoke about how they want to work with other women who experience abuse. Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013) commented, "I feel as though I was put on this Earth to change it, to make a difference, to

make people happy." Cassiopeia (personal interview, November 16, 2013) currently helps young women through her church: "Until recently, I never realized and understood that I was a product of domestic violence. It's got to end somewhere. I speak into women's lives. You're worth it. The main key is you got to learn to love yourself and forgive yourself."

One participant, as a result of experiencing abuse and now being in a healthy relationship, is mindful of any type of verbal aggression: "If you are too aggressive with your words . . . I am done" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013). Andromeda (personal interview, October 10, 2013) also stated that when she looks at her life now in light of what occurred in the past she sees "the benefit": "I was able to figure out how to love myself and to take care of myself." Cassiopeia is now able to sit with herself, her past, and her thoughts:

> I didn't know how to sit with me. I used to have what I called couch Saturdays where I sat in the house with just me, because for me to be with me was very hard because there was a lot of pain from my past, a lot of guilt for my past. I had to learn how to deal with that pain. (personal interview, November 16, 2013)

Orion (personal interview, December 14, 2013) focuses on achieving "forgiveness for myself" and described how the abuse shaped her: "[It] made me stronger, more resilient. I worked on me and I had to, because I didn't want to find myself in this situation again. I didn't want to self-sabotage again." Ariel emerged stronger and with a belief that women like her need to maintain high standards and not lower them to make a partner happy. Ariel (personal interview, November 23, 2013) stated, "We need you to have those high standards for yourself. That way we can come together easily. I don't think that a woman that's got everything going for her should have to lower her standards, because nine times out of ten, it's not going to work."

Hispanic Population Findings

A total of seven participants from the Hispanic community were sought to participate in the study, and contact was made with four different Hispanic community leaders in Sacramento County. An organization called La Familia, which provides services to Hispanic women, placed the study's advertising in their establishment, with no results. Of the four participants who were not responsive, two of them were resistant to disclosing their experiences with abuse to someone they did not know or trust and who was not affiliated with the church community. A third participant denied the existence of abuse in her life to the referral, although the referral witnessed multiple physical altercations. The fourth participant would not return calls, although she told the referral that she was open to being contacted directly via her mobile phone.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system in which the three Hispanic participants grew up (prior to age 18). While the three women had unique experiences, this representation is intended to show the common findings within the population.

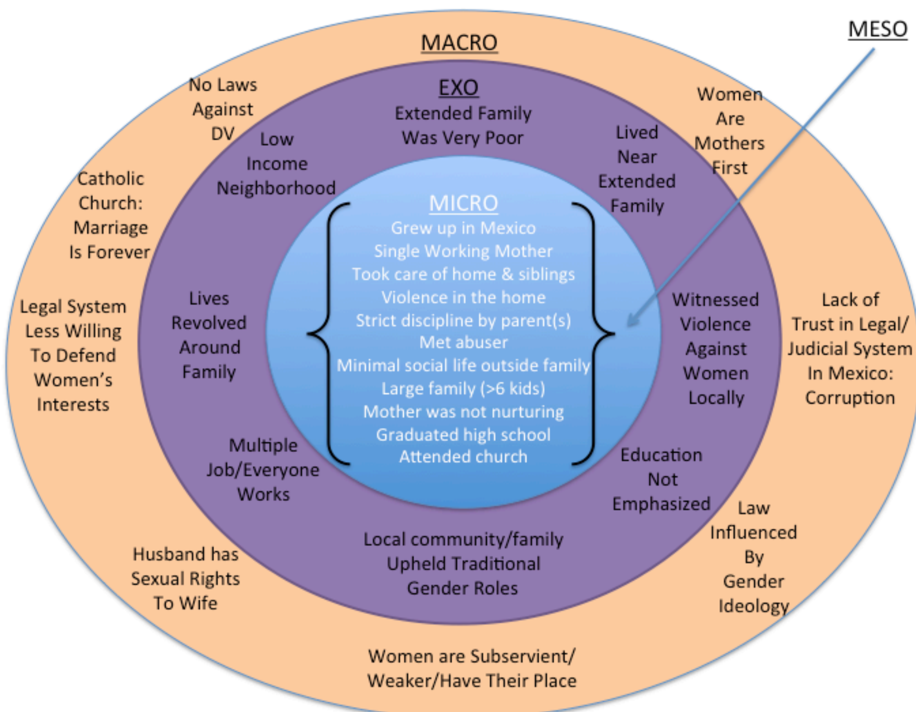

Figure 4.8: Common social-ecological system of the Hispanic participants prior to 18 years of age.

Microsystem (< 18 years of age). Two of the three participants were born and grew up in Mexico. The third participant was raised in Southern California. Two of the participants lived in homes with more than six brothers and sisters, whereas the third had only one brother. The two participants who grew up in Mexico were raised by single mothers and learned at a young age to take responsibility for caring for siblings and taking care of the home: "So that was my childhood . . . I was the mom" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014). About her childhood experience with her siblings, Musca said: "Kind of grew up on our own . . . no structure because no one was home" (personal interview, February 21, 2014). All three participants commented that their mothers were very strong and not particularly nurturing. One participant described

her mother as both "standoffish" and "critical" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

Musca's father passed away when Musca when young, leaving her mother with eight children to raise: "My childhood was more depressing than anything" (personal interview, February 21, 2014). Another participant's parents divorced, and her father relocated to the United States. As a result, her mother was forced to work: "I would say for that for the most part I've grown up very independently, knowing how to fend for myself since I was little" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013). In both Musca's and Venus's cases, their mothers remarried and a stepfather entered their lives. Both Musca and Venus commented that their stepfathers were good to them, and neither participant disclosed any negative experiences with them. Hydra's parents were married throughout her childhood. She commented that her father was an alcoholic for part of her childhood: "I just knew him as a fun-loving man, who never missed a day of work due to his drinking. I witnessed my mother often being disappointed in his drinking" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014). Hydra's father eventually quit drinking and smoking because he "was very conscientious of how we would grow up as young ladies" (personal interview, March 17, 2014).

When asked about whether there was violence in the home, one of the participants commented that by her definition, there was no violence in the home, with a caveat: "It's very common in traditional Mexican families . . . there was abuse, but it's so hard to call it abuse for us because we obviously grew up thinking it's just discipline methods and stuff" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013). Musca also commented that while she never witnessed violence between her mother and stepfather, her mother

implied that there had been abuse in the past. Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014), never witnessed abuse between her parents but did witness some violence in the home with her older brother, who had a drug problem: "And you could just see in his eyes . . . you knew if you were sitting at the dinner table he was about to flip the table over . . . that was alarming."

All three participants commented that their childhood lives revolved around their families and that they had minimal social interaction. Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) stated: "I didn't have any childhood or any teenage—dating or even going out to movies or going out to parties and things like that." For two participants this minimal social interaction was a result of having to work and assuming responsibility for the housework. The third participant felt "socially inept" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014) because she was raised in a remote area where all interactions were family based.

Two of the three participants attended a Catholic church regularly. The third participant's family did not disclose any affiliation with a religion during her childhood.

Two of the three participants met their abusers while they were still under the age of 18. Musca met her abuser when she was 14 years old, after she moved to Sacramento with her mother, stepfather, and siblings. She recalls meeting her abuser: "I was very young. I was naive, strong, smart, and what I saw in him, everything. Like everything that an abuser would use. Nice words and he was actually a Christian, so I thought what better can that be or worse can that be" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014). Musca became pregnant at 15 and was given consent to marry the father of her child. Looking back, Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) stated, "You're in love and

you don’t care where you are going to live and what’s going to happen. All I think I was worried about was my baby.” The other participant met her abuser when she was in the 8th grade and living in the United States. Their relationship started as a friendship: “We were just really best friends. He’s known everything . . . he was there for me being away from my parents. He was there for everything” (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013). Venus was 16 years old when she first started dating her abuser.

All three participants graduated from high school. Musca, who had a small child, continued to pursue her education in the United States and graduated from high school.

Mesosystem (< 18 years of age). The interaction among the elements in these participants’ microsystems resulted in limited exposure to the world outside their immediate family’s living circumstances. For the two participants who had to work both outside and inside the home to support their families, their experience with social interaction, such as extracurricular activities and dating, was minimal. Rather, these two participants assumed adult-like roles at a young age. The third participant, who grew up in the United States, also had limited social interaction outside her large family mostly due to living in a rural area for the first decade of her childhood.

Exosystem (< 18 years of age). All three participants had family histories of living in poverty. Musca and Venus lived in low-income neighborhoods close to their extended families. It was because of their impoverished circumstances that both Musca and Venus had to work to help support the family. As a result, education was not emphasized in either family. Hydra, who grew up in the United States, was encouraged to go to school and considered herself the smart girl in her neighborhood. Hydra’s

neighborhood was not solely Hispanic. Furthermore, her family did not live in poverty, although her parents had grown up in impoverished circumstances.

What was most salient in the exosystems of these three participants were the traditional gender roles they observed. Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014), although she grew up in the United States, was raised with a father who "had traditional cultural thinking of women had their place and they would be happy being the mother, the housewife, maybe the secretary if they wanted to work." Venus's (personal interview, December 11, 2013) observation was that "it's like we are trained to be weaker in the sense that we always have to protect ourselves." Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) learned that "women were worthless": "I didn't really see women striving or trying to go to school or try to learn something."

Two of the participants witnessed violence toward women in their local communities in Mexico. Musca stated:

> All I saw was, it was the females getting hit, getting beat up. I saw them always screaming, always fighting or always minimizing their worth. Whatever the husband said, that's how it needs to be. So that's the way I looked at women as I was growing up . . . it's a lot of macho. (personal interview, February 21, 2014)

Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) commented that the threat of being harmed as a woman was always present in the local community: "You don't let just girls walk around. Like walk to the store or to the market or anywhere on their own. You always try to find some sort of male protection."

Macrosystem (< 18 years of age). Two of the three participants lived in Mexico during their childhoods, whereas one grew up in the United States. The macrosystem represented in Figure 4.5 represents predominantly the macrosystem for the two participants who grew up in the Mexico. The Mexican legal system is structured

differently than it is in the United States, in that the application of legislation, its interpretation, and judicial rulings on the legislation differ, are based on where one lives. Furthermore, there is a cultural component in the administration of justice meaning:

> The personal opinions of judges and other authorities permeate judicial decisions and sentences. This understanding in turn, allows for the awareness of why women do not approach these institutions and why, when they do, they almost never achieve the expected result. (Falcon, 2011, p. 346)

In Mexico there is widespread distrust of the judicial system due to many incidents of corruption and inefficiency. This corruption especially impacts women, and as a result, few lawyers are willing to defend women who were victims of crime. According to Falcon (2011), "the law is an expression of the dominant ideology . . . traditionally the needs of women have been ignored by the law, relegating them to the realm of the uncontemplated" (p. 347).

Historically in Mexico, there were no laws against domestic violence. In 1996 the House of Representatives for Mexico City enacted the Law for the Assistance and Prevention of Intra-Family Violence. This law applied only within the boundaries of Mexico City and was fraught with ambiguity, resulting in difficulty in its application. Furthermore, the law stipulated administrative resolutions and not criminal ones. In 1997 the president of Mexico promoted a reform initiative that included criminal punishment for abusers and stated that rape within the confines of marriage constituted a criminal act. However, the individual republics would need to adopt these laws in order to enforce them. Essentially, even though efforts were made to address the problem of domestic violence in Mexican law, adoption, application, and enforcement were inconsistent and obfuscated by the gender ideology inherent in Mexican culture (Falcon, 2011).

Two other factors that existed in the macrosystems of one participant who grew up in Mexico and another participant who grew up in the United States was the influence of the Catholic Church and the value placed on motherhood. Both participants learned from the church that marriage is an eternal commitment and one that cannot be broken.

Chronosystem (< 18 years of age). For two of the participants, a disruptive change in their lives occurred when they moved during their childhood years. Musca (personal interview February 21, 2014) commented on her move from Mexico to the United States: "It was a lot of adjustment. It was too much for us. We were teenagers, no English at all and different customs. I mean, life was so fast." For Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014), the move from a rural area with acreage to a neighborhood with tract homes also required some adjustment: "That was a change for me, from having the total freedom . . . to this whole exposure to a new world. I felt like I was socially inept."

For two of the participants, a disruptive event during their childhood years was the loss of a sibling. Venus lost her younger sister to leukemia, which is what precipitated the divorce of her parents. The divorce was another disruptive childhood event that influenced the dynamics in her life and resulted in limited interaction with her father, whereas prior to the death of her sister, Venus and her father had a strong relationship. Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) lost her older brother to a drug-related incident, which was devastating to her: "My name was known as the smart student and when he was killed because it was a small town, my name was now related to the kind of family that I came from."

Both Musca and Venus had stepfathers in their lives. For Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014), the entrance of a stepfather into her life was less disruptive than the subsequent birth of her younger sister: "When my sister came along, it was more of desolation. There was a little jealousy here and there." As mentioned above, when Venus's mother got married, Venus and her brother relocated to the United States. Although she never lived with her stepmother, her father's remarriage was also a disruptive event in her life. Venus's father had children with his new wife and did not include Venus or her brother in his new family, at the request of Venus's (personal interview, December 11, 2013) stepmother: "My dad has expressed that [my stepmother] doesn't want us to talk to [my siblings] because she feels, she doesn't trust us and like we're going to somehow hurt them and stuff." As a result, Venus was neither able to rebuild her relationship with her father nor build any relationship with her half-siblings.

The graphic below represents the common social-ecological system of the three Hispanic participants after they turned 18 years of age and shows when they experienced abuse. While the three women had unique experiences growing up, this representation is intended to show the common findings within the population.

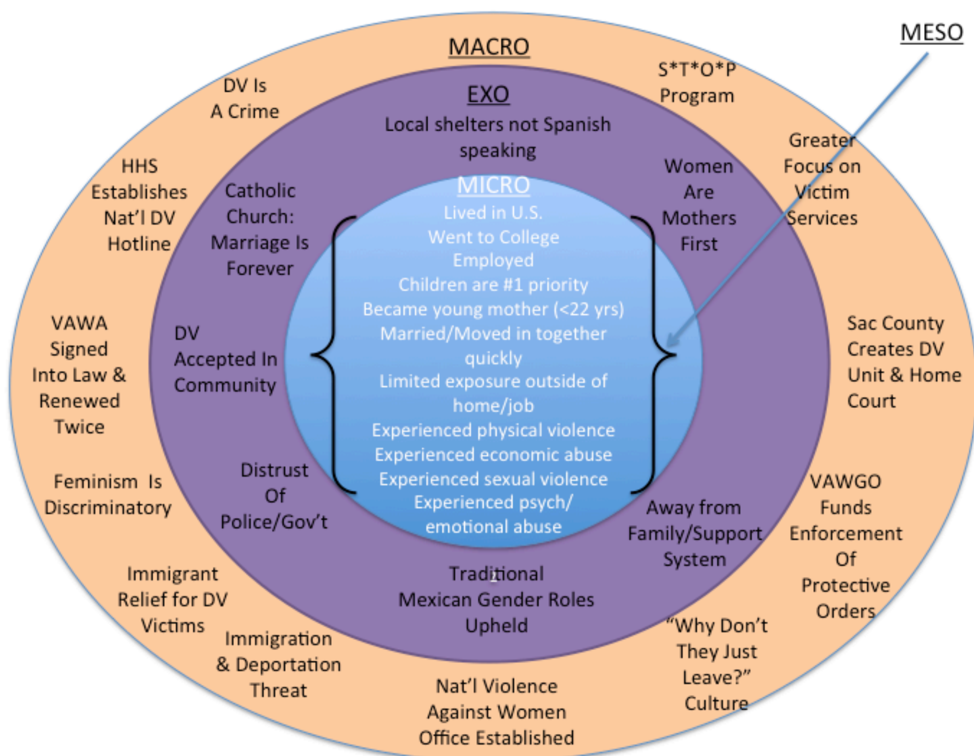

Figure 4.9: Common social-ecological system of the Hispanic participants after 18 years of age.

Microsystem (> 18 years of age). By the age of 18, all three participants were living in the United States and employed. Two of the three participants were pursuing college as well, whereas the third participant joined the U.S. Army against the wishes of her parents: "They were a bit disappointed when I joined the military, they saw that as a man's world" (Hydra, March 17, 2014).

All three participants were in serious relationships with their abusers by the time they were 19 years old. Venus moved in with her boyfriend during her second year of college, at the age of 19. Venus's boyfriend was not in college and had dropped out of high school. Within a year of joining the military, Hydra met her husband in a specialty telecommunications school for the United States Army. As mentioned above, Musca was

married at the age of 15 and by 18 was living in a home with her husband. Her husband also had dropped out of high school and was working.

What two of the participants share is the speed at which they became seriously involved with their abusers. Musca did not interact or socialize with other males until she met her husband, at the age of 14. Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) describes her husband as "Prince Charming. Too good of a husband. Too good of a citizen. He was always patient. He was always the type of individual that did not like conflicts. He was always the perfect husband." Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) described her husband this way: "[He was] sweet as honey. He dressed nicely. He always seemed clean. I felt perfectly safe. We dated very briefly, enough for me to think he seems like a nice person." Within three weeks of meeting, Hydra and her husband were married and relocating to Germany due to their military deployment.

All three participants described, to different degrees, how they did not really know their abusers well enough when they committed to them. Venus (personal interview, December 12, 2013) said of her husband, "He had high expectations . . . following the typical Mexican household of the woman to take care of the cleaning the cooking, the whatever. That was one part about him that I didn't know. I was shifting what I was doing. I was trying to accommodate him." Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) described the first three years of her marriage: "I was still in a cloud where I wanted a family regardless of what was going on. Everything is fine. Everything is going to be fine." Because of Hydra's (personal interview, March 17, 2014) short courtship with her husband, she was unaware that he had a drug problem: "I found out he was strung out on heroin . . . I had no clue."

The three participants experienced physical, sexual, economic, psychological, and emotional abuse. Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) described a period in which tensions were building period: “It was chain effect . . . the arguments just got louder. One argument got out of proportion and we were up in each other’s faces and stuff.” Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) described the abuse as “mainly just pushing and shoving. It was like whatever was happening all of a sudden whatever movement he was making had a lot of strength to it.” Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) explained that after abusive incidents she sought comfort from her abuser because “you’re physically in pain and so you just want somebody to take care of you. The only person that’s there is that one person who hurt you in the first place.”

For Hydra and Musca, the abuse started when they confronted their husbands about something the two participants had uncovered. Hydra confronted her husband when she discovered his addiction to heroin: “I began to argue with him, which got him excited and he punched me in the eye. It was so loud that the neighbor came out and asked if I was OK.” Her husband eventually rehabilitated, but upon Hydra’s pregnancy with their first child, her husband “went back to his old ways” (personal interview, March 17, 2014) of using drugs and engaging in abusive behavior toward her. Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) also experienced economic abuse: “I would go to the bank to find out why I am overdrawn and found out that he had taken all the money out of the bank.”

When Musca discovered that her husband had a girlfriend who was 15 years old and that he was making an extra paycheck to support his girlfriend, she confronted him directly. She described his response to this confrontation: “He got really upset. That’s

when he started being aggressive. He came and pushed me around the house. He broke windows and doors, punched walls, and he was out of control. Because now I knew who he was" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014). Musca separated from her husband, and that is when he began to psychologically and emotionally abuse her:

> No one is going to like you. No one is going to love you with four kids. Who will? Everything you have is because of me . . . where you came from, you had nothing. Now everything you have is from me. I'm going to take the kids, I'm going to do this and I'm going to make sure that you don't get your green card. (personal interview, February 21, 2014)

Although Musca was living separately from her husband, he continued to visit Musca and the kids at her home as well as exert control over Musca: "He was always just controlling me in staying married" (personal interview, February 21, 2014). At one point, her husband wanted to reconcile with her, and Musca told him that although she did not want a divorce, she was done with the relationship. Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) recounted, "That was his crack . . . that's when he knew that he was not going to be able to keep a wife and the kids and everybody else. He knew he was going to lose at the end. So he couldn't have any more control over me." It was shortly after this event that Musca's husband snuck into her bedroom late at night: "And then something woke me up, and I looked and he was three standing . . . completely naked. I got scared. I knew what he wanted. He raped me. He tied me. I couldn't defend myself" (personal interview, February 21, 2014). Musca was raped a second time and became pregnant. She (personal interview, February 21, 2014) was attacked a third time, during which her husband broke her ribs, punched and kicked her, leaving her unconscious: "All the bed and floor was full of blood."

In both Musca's and Hydra's cases, their children witnessed the abuse. Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) recalls her daughter saying to Musca's husband: "What is wrong with you? Why are you hurting my mommy?" Musca's four-year-old son also witnessed his mother bleeding on the floor after the last severe attack. Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) remembers: "My little boy woke up, he was rubbing his eyes trying to figure out what was going on and he got scared." Hydra's (personal interview, March 17, 2014) son saw the violence: "[My baby] witnessed when he hit me, when he punched me in the eye. He would get excited when I would accuse him of things in front of the baby and I could see the result from that. If I would start the vacuum cleaner or anything noisy, the baby would be upset."

Mesosystem (> 18 years of age). All three participants were living in microsystems that they believed to be stable but were quickly disrupted when the participants discovered that their intimate partners were abusive. The three participants misjudged the stability of their microsystems and found themselves living in circumstances that made them question themselves. Going to college and believing herself to be a strong and independent woman who grew up learning to fend for herself, one participant did not know how to make sense of her circumstances: "I've always had that mentality that I'm strong and independent, I won't put up with [abuse] and then I did. It messed with my mind a little bit" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013). Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) partially attributed the abuse she experienced to her abuser leaving his circumstances and living with her in a college environment: "We both weren't really happy . . . it was hard because for the first time my friends weren't his friends."

About her first encounter with abuse, Hydra doubted her own sanity: "I was going crazy: "at that point, that was a critical event for me because I really, ever since then, questioned what was real and what was not" (personal interview, March 17, 2014). Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) struggled as well: "[I was] trying to find out why he became so evil within a few months. Why be became so aggressive . . . it was hard for me to understand that somebody that was so good to me hurt me that bad."

Exosystem (> 18 years of age). Many of the cultural influences and ideologies that resided in the macrosystem were now included in the participants' exosystem. A common response to the abuse among the three participants was nondisclosure to friends, family, or law enforcement. Efforts were commonly made to ensure that outward appearances hid the abuse these participants were experiencing at home. Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) stated, "Last time I had bruises here on my forearms I covered them. My parents didn't know about the abuse. I didn't tell them. I never really talked about it to anybody. It was very like pride."

Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) refrained from telling her family because she feared disappointing and hurting those whom she cared about: "I always lied to my kids, to my family, to church, to everybody. Hiding the fact that he was never with me . . . because I didn't want to hurt my kids or anybody." She refrained from calling the police after the rape because she feared they would not believe her: "Who will believe me? And that was his words when I said, 'You know what, I'm going to call the cops' and he told me, 'There's no such thing as a marriage rape'" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014). Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) also did not feel as though she could not confide in her church: "It is happening in our churches, and a lot of

us don't speak up because we are afraid of what's going to happen to us. And ultimately, a lot of churches . . . they are approving the abuse." In Musca's (personal interview, February 21, 2014) opinion, there was community acceptance of domestic violence: "It's hard to believe a woman that is really being abused because a lot of them are just used to it."

Hydra grew up in the United States and was living on a military base in Germany far from her family. She stated, "I felt trapped. I didn't have any family there, and my parents were in their midsixties then. I can't trouble them with this. There was no place to turn" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014). When asked about why she did not seek assistance from the military, her response was, "I didn't feel that I could turn to my unit because that would be a sign of weakness and me not having things under control" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014). Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) also felt compelled to handle the situation herself because of how she was raised: "Coming from a mother who had everything under control with 11 kids, I thought, well this is it. I've got to handle it all and there's no place to turn." As a result, Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) kept up the "appearance that nothing would upset the baby and everything was fine."

For the two participants who were raised in the Catholic Church and were married, an added element of pressure existed in their exosystem: the belief that marriage is a permanent commitment. This belief influenced how the two participants assessed their circumstances. Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) stated, "That's just what you're supposed to do, regardless of what you get into, you make your bed, you lay in it." Musca (personal interview, February 21, 2014) stated that because of the Church's

influence and the belief system in which she was raised, she couldn't leave: "I was trying to work things out with my husband because that was my family. That was my husband."

Hydra eventually did disclose the abuse to her family and the military police, as a result of the neighbors calling law enforcement. She was then given protection for her and her child.

The exosystem surrounding Musca did not react in a supportive manner. Because of the severity of Musca's injuries, the police were involved and because Sacramento County had a no-drop policy (in which the victim of abuse is not allowed to drop the charge) at the time, the Sacramento district attorney pursued criminal charges without Musca's input. The result was that her mother and extended family were not supportive of pursuing criminal charges, and they told Musca, "You need to work things out. You want to be marry. This is life. This is marriage . . . I don't know what you're going to do, but you need to go and work your things with him." In addition, her husband's sisters began harassing Musca to put up bail money, even though Musca's life would be in danger if her husband was let out of jail (personal interview, February 21, 2014) life: "They kept on calling and asking me, he can't go to jail, he needs to go to work so he can help you. If you can let the judge know to be on home arrest . . . they were harassing me." Musca also experienced conflicting feelings of guilt and self-blame during this time: "I felt so bad. I felt like guilty. I felt like I have put him in jail . . . I feel so bad because . . . that's the one I love, the man I love, the father of my kids" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

One of the participants did seek assistance from WEAVE and stated, "[I] felt like it was not for me" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014) because group

sessions were not in Spanish, and they did not address culturally specific issues that Hispanic women encounter. The other two participants did not seek professional help or counseling.

Macrosystem (> 18 years of age). Illegal immigration and the issues surrounding it existed in the macrosystem at this time; however, none of the three women spoke of discrimination or encountering prejudice once they were living in the United States. Two of the participants were aware of the threat of deportation if they were unable to secure a green card. One participant's abuser used the threat of deportation as a way to control her. Although during this time, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law and there was relief for immigrants who experienced domestic violence, none of the three participants were aware of this provision.

As was the case with the Russian and African American populations, the macrosystem in which these participants lived was during a historic time in the domestic violence movement when legislative efforts were being made at both the federal and state levels to impose harsher penalties for perpetrators and to provide victim-centered services. During this time, Sacramento County was the recipient of federal grant funding from VAWA that supported the creation of the Sacramento County Domestic Violence Unit and the Domestic Violence Home Court, which was tasked with providing victim-centered services and defense (Miller, 2003). Pro-arrest policies for abusers who violate restraining orders were also codified into California State law (California Senate Office of Research, 2003).

Also, as written in the former population sections, the pervasive "why-don't-they-just-leave" belief remained imbedded in the macrosystem (Walker, 1979; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999).

Chronosystem (> 18 years of age). The two major disruptive events in the lives of these three participants were experiencing domestic violence and leaving the relationship. Venus reflected on how she was caught up in a cycle:

> A rough time happens and you don't want this person around you, but then you want comfort and they're the only ones who are there, and they're offering it to you, they're telling you that they want to comfort you . . . and so that's what I think feeds the cycle. I was conscious of it but I wasn't making a move because I was caught up in the cycle. I understand the vulnerable and dependable position you may be in that forces you to stick through it or makes you think that you should. (personal interview, December 11, 2013)

When Musca recalled how domestic violence impacted her life, she stated:

> You feel violated. You feel like are you not worth it. Now I look back and I ask myself why? Why did I do that? I was in love. Now I understand a lot of women. I can't say "Why are you staying?" because I know. The same things that are keeping you home are the same things that you will be walking from. (personal interview, February 21, 2014)

Hydra (personal interview, March 17, 2014) stated that the incidents of domestic violence "surprised [her] physically and mentally," and she found herself becoming hypervigilant in her habits: "I positioned myself so that I could get out of the situation quickly, never locked in a bedroom or anything like that again. I was prepared."

One of the participants remained in the relationship, although she no longer lives with her boyfriend. She stated that the environment they were living in was exacerbating the tension between them: "I think it was the environment we were in, living together, just wasn't healthy" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013). Venus also talked about the judgment that women are subjected to when they opt to stay with their abusers:

"It made me realize the huge judgment that there is, and mainly among women, towards other women who stay in domestic violence relationships." She expressed that she was initially hesitant to discuss her experience because of this judgment and the expectation that all women should just leave their abusers. She stated, "The reason why it's harder for me to talk about it is just because you think that after experiencing that with somebody, you don't ever want them around anymore, but our relationship is good now, it's healthy now" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013).

The other two participants permanently left their abusers. Both of them reached a point where they examined themselves, their lives, and how the cycle of violence was affecting their children. After the incident in which Musca's ribs were broken and she was beaten unconscious in front of her children, she determined that she could no longer endure the abuse:

> I looked at myself in the mirror, and I was so swollen. I couldn't recognize myself and then I was in pain. I had bandages all over. And that's why I looked at myself in the mirror and I decided that's not what I want for me . . . and my kids were going to stay with me. [My] kids are number one. You don't touch my cubs, you don't touch my kids, they're mine. (personal interview, February 21, 2014)

It was in this moment that Musca made the decision to divorce her abuser. When reflecting on that moment, she displayed gratitude: "Until I actually got hurt and that's changed everything. I thank God because I needed to get hurt. I needed to wake up in the hospital with my ribs broken" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

Hydra's thought process behind leaving was similar to Musca's, in that protecting her baby was the compelling reason for leaving the relationship:

> I sucked up my pride . . . I can't let my baby be affected by this anymore so I have to do something. A child should never be hurt. You're totally responsible for a child so if that means not being together, then that's what I had to sacrifice. (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014)

Once Hydra sent her son to live with her parents, her husband left, and she never saw him again.

Hispanic Population: Now. All three participants are not currently experiencing domestic violence in their existing relationships. Venus is still with her boyfriend, but as written prior, they do not live together. Venus is still in college, involved in extracurricular activities, and enjoying her life as a young adult. When she reflects on how her experience with domestic violence impacted who she is now, she stated that it has helped her slow down, determine what she expects from relationships, and help her set boundaries. Venus (personal interview, December 11, 2013) stated: “It helped me with my boundaries, my limitations, my feelings, the difference between being in love with someone and being used to having somebody for so long in your life. It really empowered me to not try to rush through my life.” Furthermore, she stated: “I have the ability to be stronger” (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013).

Musca is remarried, has full custody of her children, and remains in contact with her abuser because he is the father of her children. She stated that he has not attempted retribution and rather came to Musca and her husband to apologize for his abusive behavior. When asked how her experience with domestic violence has impacted her life today, she stated: “It doesn’t hurt me anymore . . . it’s like a scar . . . you’re always going to look at it. It did make me very strong. If it wasn’t for that situation, I don’t think I would be where I’m at right now” (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014). Musca is interesting in getting involved with educating the community on domestic violence and helping other young Hispanic women who find themselves in situations similar to Musca’s.

Hydra is also remarried, no longer experiences domestic violence, and has no contact with her former abuser. She maintained full custody of her child and remained in the military for thirty years. When asked about how her experiences with domestic violence shaped her life today, she stated, “I learned from the choices that I made. Had this not happened, something else in life would have happened where I’d grown from it, and if that was the worst of it, then I’ve done OK. It made me a wiser person . . . I feel fully prepared to deal with anything” (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

Results and Interpretations

The following section consists of analysis of the findings as written above. Using phenomenology, the data was analyzed across all populations, and commonalities as well as differences among the populations, in terms of their experiences with domestic violence, were identified. The results of this analysis will consist of thematic groupings that represent common patterns that emerged from the data. It is critical to note that while the themes may be common, the way in which the themes manifest within the three populations may be different. These differences were attributed to the different social ecologies in which the participants resided as children and now as adults. It is the results analysis, the corresponding interpretations of the qualitative data set collected, the literature review, and the additional findings upon which conclusions from this study will be drawn and recommendations will be made.

The following are the five major themes that emerged from the findings:

1. Surrender
2. Concealment
3. Learned Helplessness

4. Escalation

5. Reconnection and Resilience

Theme One: Surrender

All three populations demonstrated the common theme of surrendering to others and/or their circumstances. There was a common theme of having few, if any, choices on how to live within the boundaries of their abusive relationships. The control that was asserted did not, however, always come solely from the abuser. While control was predominantly exerted by the abuser, for Russian and Hispanic women, the control was reinforced and condoned by their childhood and adult exosystems: “He was always just controlling me in staying married” (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014), “I felt like I needed to ask permission” (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), “He controlled everything, every aspect of my life” (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013), “But he was very, very controlling. Controlling to the fact of, who were you on the phone with, who picked you up at school, why this, why that” (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013), and “My mom said, “Wow he looks like a good guy . . . wow! It was peer pressure at that point to marry him” (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014).

For the Russian participants, the surrendering of control started with their parents and the desire these participants had for their parents’ approval. Upon approval from the parents and the subsequent marriage, control was transferred from the parents to the spouse, which is consistent with the tradition of the father handing a whip to the husband as a symbol that control has now been passed (Horne, 1999). These participants did not feel as if they had any voice or opinion in this transfer, and after the marriage was finalized, there was a period of shock and disillusionment that was followed by

resignation to their circumstances. This resignation is supported by the exosystem that surrounds the microsystems in which these women live. Even though the women were residing in the United States, the macrosystem transitioned into the exosystem and reinforced the traditional thinking in the lives of these participants.

The African American participants also surrendered their control to their intimate partners; however, this surrender followed a different trajectory. The loss of control for these participants was not immediate; rather, it had a slower pace and was couched in the perception of love, caring, and protection. Initially, their abusers were loving and protective, behavior that slowly evolved into possessiveness and control, to the point where they demanded that the participants account for their whereabouts at all times. These participants did not come from childhood social-ecological systems where their control was usurped. To the contrary, these women were often living in unstructured microsystems and forced to become independent at a young age. In examining their childhood contexts, it was found that what was often missing was the consistent presence of the biological father. This lack of paternal attention or an example of a loving father may have contributed to these participants' needs for protection and love from a male figure. Thus, the participants did not give up control consciously; rather, they felt they were surrendering to the warmth, protection, and love that perhaps these participants had missed. By the time these participants realized that they had willingly surrendered their control to their intimate partners, they were already committed and emotionally attached to these men and the security they offered.

The Hispanic participants did not speak a great deal about loss of control in their lives; rather, it appeared that there was no initial assumption that they would have any

control once they were married or committed. These participants surrendered to their circumstances and whatever came with these circumstances: "That's just what you're suppose to do, regardless of what you get into, you made your bed, you lay in it" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014) and "I can't leave. I was trying to work things out with my husband because that was my family. That was my husband" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

When these participants met their abusers, they were all very young and had limited social experience. Because the social-ecological system in which the participants were raised supported the traditional Mexican view that women are to be submissive to men, the participants did not enter their relationships with a conscious sense of control over their own lives. Once they were married or living with their intimate partners, these women surrendered to their circumstances because of the belief that marriage is forever and women are to accommodate men, reflecting the concepts of machismo and *marianismo* (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2013).

Theme Two: Concealment

All 11 participants made conscious decisions not to disclose the abuse they were enduring. This concealment was driven by numerous factors that directly connect to the participants' childhood social ecologies and the social ecologies in which these participants resided when they experienced domestic violence. Concealment manifested in multiple ways: nondisclosure to family, friends, church members, social services, and law enforcement/justice system. Concealment meant not only keeping the abuse private but also keeping up the appearance that all was well in the lives of these participants: "I kept everything inside of me" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "I kept everything from the outer world" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "It was

a secret, I avoided everybody" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "What was the point of saying anything else, telling?" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), "If I did not say it, then it really did not happen" (Cordelia, personal interview), "I always lied to my kids, to my family, to church, to everybody" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014), "I never really talked about it to anybody" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013), and "I've got to handle it all and there is no place to turn" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

Within the Russian community, concealment ties back into the participants' childhood social ecologies. When they were growing up in the former Soviet Union, domestic violence was a private family matter and a nonexistent social problem, and thus no one spoke about it. Not only were these participants taught to keep family matters private, but they were also unsure what they were grappling with due to a lack of acknowledgment in the macrosystem that domestic violence existed. Moving to the United States, where domestic violence was acknowledged as a major social and health problem in the macrosystem, did not change the microsystems in which these women experienced abuse. The elements in the participants' childhood macrosystems transferred into these participants' exosystems upon their move to the United States. Unlike in the former Soviet Union, the exosystems in which these women experienced abuse became a barrier preventing their new macrosystems from penetrating. Essentially, these participants were not aware that what they were experiencing was abusive as well as illegal, which is consistent with Misner-Pollard's (2009) and Horne's (1999) point that even after the fall of the former Soviet Union, there were no laws prohibiting a husband

from physically beating his wife, and women had no legal recourse, even if they are physically injured.

Unlike the Russian women, 80% of the African American participants were educated on domestic violence and were aware that domestic violence was both morally wrong and illegal. One of the participants, although she knew it was illegal, accepted domestic violence as a normal part of life because she had witnessed it as a child and learned that as long as the man was providing, abuse was acceptable. However, even armed with the knowledge that domestic violence was unacceptable, these women opted to keep the abuse to themselves. Consistent with Gillum's (2002) study of African American women as community matriarchs, this concealment may be attributable to African American female pride and the cultural value that existed in both their childhood and adult exosystems. The desire to avoid being judged by the community was a factor in keeping the abuse private.

In Orion's case, she resisted disclosure due to her distrust of law enforcement as a result of having been discriminated against when she did engage law enforcement. Because of the humiliation she endured and her revictimization at the hands of law enforcement, she determined that disclosure would make no difference and that the best option was to keep the abuse private. This experience corroborates Gillum's (2008) study that African American women are more likely to be arrested in addition to their abusers.

Although only two participants directly addressed this, what also contributed to concealing the abuse was the aversion to being alone. The feeling of being loved and the memory of when these men were kind, caring, and protective of them not only kept these

women involved in the relationships, but it also prevented them from admitting the nature of the relationship to friends and family because once the abuse was known, these women knew they would be encouraged by their friends and family to leave the relationship. The literature states that African Americans tend to stay in the relationship because they do not want to be single mothers (Hampton et al., 2003; Nash, 2005); however, this was not discovered. Rather, this aversion to being alone appeared to be linked to the lack of a father or close male relationship in the lives of these participants when they were children.

Two of the three Hispanic participants grew up in environments in which they witnessed domestic violence as part of the norm. The third participant did not witness domestic violence but was raised with the traditional Mexican values in which being a mother, a caretaker, and a loyal wife for eternity were the highest priorities. Similar to those of the Russian community, these participants' adult exosystems were the products of the macrosystems in which they grew up. Within the participants' exosystems were a distrust of the government and police, traditional gender roles, an acceptance of domestic violence in the community, and the religious value that marriage is forever. While the macrosystem contained provisions for these women, a significant threat existed in the macrosystem: deportation. Not all these elements were considerations for these three participants; however, all three women looked at the totality of their circumstances when making their decision to disclose the abuse. Consistent with the study conducted by Kelly (2009), these women looked at multiple factors, including the impact on their parents, their children, the church, and their husbands when deliberating whether to disclose the abuse. Although these women were aware that the abuse they were

experiencing was unacceptable, so many factors existed in their exosystems that supported keeping the abuse private that these factors outweighed any decision to seek help.

Theme Three: Learned Helplessness

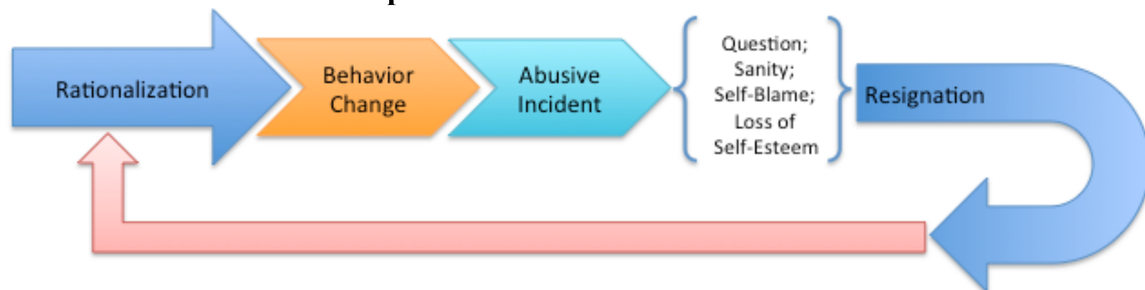

Figure 4.10: The cycle of learned helplessness.

A common theme among the three populations was a demonstration of learned helplessness, as shown in Figure 4.10. As described by Walker (1979), learned helplessness is the passivity that results from modifying one's behavior in an effort to avoid abuse—and yet the abuse continues regardless of the behavioral modification. I discovered that this concept of learned helplessness followed a terminal cycle, as shown in Figure 4.7. The cycle starts with rationalization of the abuser's behavior, followed by modification of the victim's behavior with the objective of preventing an abusive episode. The abusive episode still occurs even with the behavioral accommodation, which leaves the victims feeling resigned to their circumstances. With each iteration of this cycle, the victim's sense of reality and sanity is diminished, in addition to their self-esteem. The victims engage in self-blaming, which feeds the next cycle of rationalization for staying in the relationship. As the cycle accelerates, eventually the victim has exhausted all forms of rationalization, and learned helplessness has fully manifested,

resulting in the victim's feelings of final resignation, where the victim remains. This is where the cycle terminates.

An example of how this cycle works in context is shown in Figure 4.11 below.

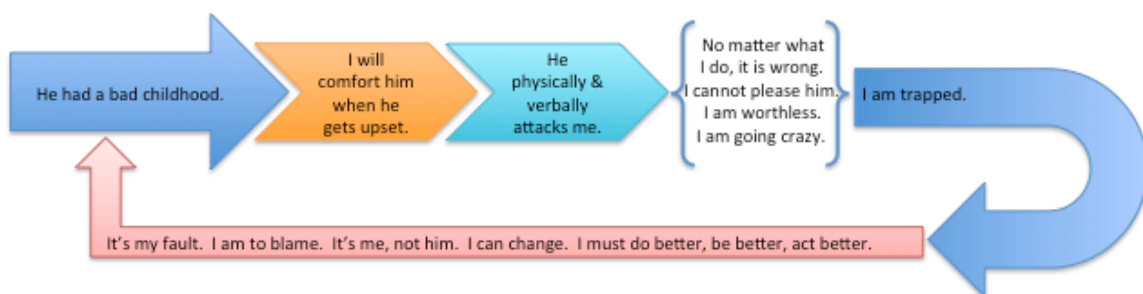

Figure 4.11: Example of the learned helplessness cycle in the context of this study.

This concept of learned helplessness addresses a critical and common misunderstanding of why women remain in abusive relationships. In this study, not all participants experienced final resignation; however, all were caught in this cycle to varying degrees and the way in which they finally broke the cycle also varied. For some of the participants, resignation was exacerbated by the exosystems that reinforced the feelings of imprisonment. The period of resignation was also worsened by the former theme of concealment: If there is no where to turn and no one to turn to, then there is no action that can be taken to change their circumstances.

Comments made by the participants demonstrated this cycle, starting with rationalization: "Probably my character—if I would just act a bit differently. It's wrong with me—not him" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "He didn't have a good childhood . . . so I should forgive him. I should be more patient" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "He was frustrated at the moment—he wasn't employed" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), "Maybe he'll change.

Got to give people a chance" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), and "We both weren't really happy . . . it was hard because for the first time my friends weren't his friends" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013).

Rationalization was often followed by a behavioral modification, as described by the participants: "I was shifting what I was doing; I was trying to accommodate" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013), "I'm sorry, maybe I did something wrong so you yelled at me. I'm sorry" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), and "Just don't leave me by myself. Do whatever you want to do, but don't leave me" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

After behavioral modifications were made and the abuse still occurred, many of the participants began to doubt who they were and to examine their own sanity: "I didn't feel like an adult" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "I thought I was crazy . . . everything I speak was wrong" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "This is not happening to me . . . this is not real" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013), "I'm too smart! I know all the signs—this isn't me!" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), and "I was going crazy . . . I questioned what was real and what was not" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

Many of the participants also blamed themselves for the abuse: "Maybe I deserved it" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), "It was my fault, fault, fault, fault. Only bad emotions inside of me. I felt so bad" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013), and "I felt so bad. I felt like guilty. I felt like I have put him in jail . . . I feel so bad because . . . that's the one I love, the man I love, the father of my kids" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

Finally, many of the women felt stripped of their self-esteem and confidence: "Your esteem is taken away because you begin to wonder what did you do? You're always being yelled at" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), "When I stay with [my abuser], I feel myself degrade. I just, I'm going down, down from this ladder" (Lyra, personal interview, December 3, 2013), and "You have no self esteem—not low—no self-esteem" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013).

When the participants entered the period of resignation, common sentiments were feeling trapped and feeling desperate, especially at the point of final resignation: "When you're on this ship and there is an ocean around you, you feel trapped. The more I thought about it, the more I felt dark . . . hopeless inside" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "[I] felt broken on the inside . . . I was going to slit my wrists" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013), "I was already emotionally dead . . . I was on a suicide mission" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013), and "I felt trapped . . . there was no place to turn" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

In the Russian population, this cycle was clearly evident.
All three participants made multiple attempts to rationalize their abuser's behavior, modify their own, and then resign themselves to their circumstances. This cycle of learned helplessness is supported by the macrosystems in which these participants were raised and the exosystems in which the participants experienced abuse. The threat of being ostracized and stigmatized by their communities was a salient consideration and one that likely supported the continuing rationalization and attempts to modify their behavior to prevent further abuse. Furthermore, as Johnson (2001) discovered, in the

former Soviet Union, the police often blamed the women for provoking their abuse, which also contributed to the self-blame rationalization.

The African American population demonstrated varying levels of cognitive dissonance in their situations. Although Gillum (2002) believed this to be a stereotype of African American women, within the childhood and adult exosystems of all these participants is the belief system that African American females are the sources of strength for their families, friends, and communities. Tolerating abusive behavior is contradictory to these participants' view of themselves as adult African American women. With the exception of one participant, four of the five participants were surprised that abuse would happen to them, and they frequently denied that it *was* happening. As the cycle continued and abusive incidents occurred, the cognitive dissonance became more pronounced because these participants were engaging in accommodating behaviors that contradicted their own value and belief system that African American women are strong. Unlike in the literature (Gillum, 2008; Nash, 2005), there was no evidence that these women remained or rationalized staying in their abusive relationships in an effort to protect African American men from going to prison.

The Hispanic population in this study quickly entered the state of final resignation. Accommodations were made for their abusers' behavior; however, because of the influence of the Catholic Church and the traditional Mexican values that existed in their childhood macrosystems and adult exosystems, feelings of being trapped in one's circumstances appeared to be expected. Final resignation did not result due to exhausting all forms of rationalization and behavioral modification; rather, it appeared that

remaining in final resignation was what a devoted Hispanic mother does, which is consistent with Kelly's (2009) study.

Theme Four: Escalation

Another common theme revealed during this study was that when the participants took any control back, fought back, or confronted their partners about terminating the relationship, the abuse worsened. This is common; in fact, domestic violence advocates often warn women that upon separation from their abuser, the violence may worsen (McFarlane, Campbell, Wilt, Sachs, Ulrich, & Xu, 1999). When the abusers feel they may lose control of their partners, they may get desperate and threaten to kill the victim. This period of intensified abusive behaviors on the part of the abuser can be partially attributed to their own social ecologies. While meeting with the participants' abusers was outside the scope of this study, it appeared that when the male role as defined by the social ecology was threatened or diminished, the abusers attempted to restore their position of dominance in the eyes of themselves, their victims, their families, their friends, and their communities.

While in both the Russian and Hispanic populations this theme was pronounced, it was less evident in the African American population. In several cases, the participants had never experienced physical violence until they attempted to separate from their abusers. Furthermore, many of these participants had never had their lives threatened until they stood up to their abusers and attempted to leave.

Comments from the participants in support of this theme were: "I first started to tell him I want to split . . . he gets *really* pissed. He [made] threats with money. He was checking my emails, answering on my behalf . . . threatening me when the kids got bad grades in school" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "He told me, 'If you

decide to separate with me, I'll kill you. I'll kill the kids . . . [we will go] to the Auburn Hills and I will push you off the hills with the car and we'll die together or you'll die" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "I told him, I can't do this anymore and he grabbed me by my neck and choked me" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013), "I kept a large knife on my side of the bed and he stopped me dead in my tracks and said, 'I dare you, I dare you to get it. I'll kill you today'" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), and "He got really upset. That's when he started being aggressive. He came and pushed me around the house . . . because now I knew who he was" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

When the participants in the Russian community separated from their abusers, there were repercussions in terms of worsening physical, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse from their abusers, as well as local community backlash. As Johnson and Saarinen (2013) wrote, when Putin came into power in Russia in 2000, the male notion of masculinity as defined by strength, power, and sexual aggression was reinforced, and the participants' attempt to leave their abusers called into question their abusers' masculinity. The participants' abusers attempted to save their own reputations by blaming the participants for the separation and spreading untrue rumors that degraded the reputation of the participants. Because of the exosystem in the Russian community that supports the male position of dominance, the abusers were viewed by the community as the ones victimized by the participants' inappropriate behavior, lack of respect for Russian values, and selfishness. Being ostracized by the local community was not the only backlash; the participants' immediate families also penalized the participants by

supporting the abusers. Essentially, for the Russian participants, terminating the relationship meant terminating other significant relationships as well.

Within the African American community, there was less evidence of escalating abuse when the participants attempted to leave; however, it did occur in some instances. Consistent with the research, because several of the African American abusers were either unemployed or drug users when they were intimately involved with the participants, there was a greater likelihood of these men engaging in abusive behavior toward their intimate partners as a result of asserting and reclaiming their manhood (Hampton et al., 2003). Also consistent with the literature, when African American females demonstrate strength and more “matriarch-like” behaviors, African American males may be threatened by this especially if it is perceived that the female is more successful or powerful than the male (Gillum, 2002; Hampton et al., 2003). African American males live in a macrosystem in which masculinity is defined by employment, socioeconomic status, and the ability to provide. Three of the five participants in this study were well educated, employed, and in a better socioeconomic position than their intimate partners. This alone may have posed a threat to the participants’ abusers, and if the participants attempted to assert themselves, this possibly exacerbated the existing feelings of inadequacy in these men.

In the Hispanic population, when the participants confronted their intimate partners about their behaviors, that is when the abuse first manifested and ultimately worsened. The abusers’ machismo, as described by Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013), was threatened when the participants asserted themselves. Also consistent with the study conducted by Klevens et al. (2007), as these women became increasingly independent

and successful in their professions or in school, their dependence on their intimate partners diminished and the abusers' control mechanisms were also weakened. This weakening of control threatened the abusers' image of being both superior and dominant, which contributed to the abuse escalating.

Theme Five: Reconnection and Resilience

At different points in the lives of these participants, an emotional and mental reconnection to valuing the self emerged and from this, resilience manifested, resulting in the participants' desire to eliminate abuse from their lives. For 10 out of the 11 participants, the self-identification as mother and protector of her children became the compelling factor that drove these participants to take control back and change their lives, regardless of the familial and social consequences.

Comments that demonstrated this were: "All the sacrificing has to have a purpose. If my death or sacrificing would not bring any good to him or to my kids, so why I'm doing this?" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "I strongly believe that my happiness will positively affect my kids" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "I finally got a good job. I was quitting dope. I was trying to make it better so I can work to get my son back and deal with things" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), "All I could think about was my son . . . I jeopardized my son's safety (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), "That's not what I wanted for my daughter" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013), "[I] cannot allow my children to see this" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013), "You're totally responsible for a child so if that means not being together, then that's what I had to sacrifice" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014), and "[My] kids are number one.

You don't touch my cubs, you don't touch my kids, they're mine" (Musca, personal interview, February, 21, 2014).

Another factor that compelled several of these participants to make changes in their lives was a reconnection to their inner resilience. The participants had natural survival instincts and were able to withstand abusive circumstances; however, simply surviving was no longer enough. While many of these participants viewed themselves as broken, emotionally dead inside, and essentially shells of who they used to be, deep within them existed a source of strength and resilience that was dormant but not destroyed. It is as if many of these participants had to lose much of their self-worth in order to reawaken and reconnect to their sources of strength. For some of the participants, sustaining severe injuries, becoming homeless, and being threatened with death or the death of their children was the equivalent to hitting rock bottom, in which the only two choices were to remain in a state of final resignation or to rise up against their circumstances. Consistently, all participants rose up by leveraging that inner reserve. Some of the participants attributed this inner reserve to their relationship with God and their religious upbringing.

Comments that support this theme were: "Maybe I have the right to be happy and energetic and joyful and free" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "I decided to change my life . . . not stay like this. Otherwise I wanted to get crazy" (Lyra, personal interview, December 10, 2013), "I had myself. I was my cheerleader. I looked in the mirror. I told me that 'you are here to make a difference. You are here' . . . You have to have that fight, that drive to say, 'I don't have to deal with it!'" (Ariel, personal interview, November 23, 2013), "That reserve in me kicked in . . . I knew how to do

things to maintain, to survive . . . I knew to read my Bible and pray" (Cordelia, personal interview, November 19, 2013), "When I walked through the doors of that church on a Wednesday night, it felt like every chain and shackle came off of me. I wanted to live again. I realized that I was somebody. I was important and my life turned all the way around" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "It's time to move on. It's time to heal over it" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), and "I had bandages all over. And that's why I looked at myself in the mirror and I decided that's not what I want for me" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014).

When the participants were asked how their experiences with abuse changed their lives, a common thread in their answers was that the resilience that emerged and carried them through eliminating abuse from their lives is now the primary source of strength, wisdom, and self-worth that propels them forward in their lives. Many of the participants reflected that had it not been for the abuse they experienced, they would not be as strong, wise, or successful as they are today. To some degree, the participants placed value on these periods of their lives as proof of their capability and ability to endure any circumstances they may encounter.

Comments that support this thread were: "I feel a lot like a person . . . I started to be so much more independent, so much stronger than I was before" (Vela, personal interview, March 10, 2014), "All my experiences shaped me who I am right now. And if I looked at myself, and I'm happy with who I am it means everything was for good. Nothing to regret" (Ara, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "The benefit . . . I was able to figure out how to love myself and to take care of myself" (Andromeda, personal interview, October 10, 2013), "I never realized . . . that I was a product of domestic

violence. It's got to end somewhere. I speak into women's lives. You're worth it. The main key is you got to learn to love yourself and forgive yourself" (Cassiopeia, personal interview, November 16, 2013), "Made me stronger, more resilient. I worked on me and I had to, because I didn't want to find myself in this situation again" (Orion, personal interview, December 14, 2013), "It helped me with my boundaries, my limitations, my feelings . . . it really empowered me to not to try rush through my life. I have the ability to be stronger" (Venus, personal interview, December 11, 2013), "It did make me very strong. If it wasn't for that situation, I don't think I would be where I'm at right now" (Musca, personal interview, February 21, 2014), and "I learned from the choices I made. It made me a wiser person . . . I feel fully prepared to deal with anything" (Hydra, personal interview, March 17, 2014).

For the Russian participants, it was a struggle to reconnect with themselves and face the consequences of the Russian community. However, despite the challenges and the fortified exosystem that contradicted these participants' desire to change their circumstances, they did so anyhow. A driving force behind this change was their desire to protect their children and to minimize the influence of the exosystem on their children as they became adults. It is unclear whether it was the influence of living in the United States and acculturation that contributed to the participants' thought processes or whether these participants would have acted similarly if they had still been living in the former Soviet Union. What is clear is that identification as a mother was a critical factor and one that justified leaving their abusers, despite the backlash.

The African American participants all spoke about their desire to protect their children; however, this desire did not become a justification for leaving the abusive

relationship. Certainly, it was a salient consideration for the participants, but these participants did not need mental license to terminate the abuse in their lives. The African American participants knew that domestic violence was morally wrong and that it fundamentally contradicted what they knew to be true of themselves as African American women. For varying reasons, this deeply held identity as being the strength of the community and the family had been stifled and reemerged when these participants reconnected to it. For two of the participants, this reconnection was spiritually based, and for others it occurred as a result of enduring more severe abuse. It was discovered that among these five participants there existed a natural resilience and fearlessness in confronting hardship. It could be speculated that because these participants had more difficult childhoods, they were better equipped to handle difficult circumstances; however, this cannot be confirmed without further study and investigation.

The Hispanic population's reconnection was driven by their identity as mothers and protectors of their children. In the social-ecological systems of the Hispanic population, a woman's primary role in life is that of mother. It is this core value that trumped the "marriage is forever" belief and provided a reasonable justification for the two participants with children to terminate their marriages. Because of this value the two participants with children were more at ease with their decisions to divorce their abusers, against the values within their childhood macrosystems and adult exosystems. The one participant who did not have children and did not leave the relationship opted to physically change her circumstances and no longer cohabitate with her abuser as a way to end the abuse.

Summary

The results of the data analysis revealed five common themes across the three populations. The first theme, surrender, represented the participants' loss of control and decision-making authority over the participants' own lives. For the Russian and Hispanic population, loss of control was more of an expectation, and in the African American population, relinquishing control to their abuser was a result of feeling that their abusers' behavior stemmed from feelings of love. The second theme, concealment, represented the participants' decision to keep the abuse private and not disclose it to friends, family, church, law enforcement, and/or the local community. The third theme, learned helplessness, represented a terminal cycle that started with the participants' rationalizations for the abuse, followed by a behavioral modification meant to appease their abusers and avoid an abusive episode. When the abuse still occurred even with the behavioral modification, the participants questioned their own sanity, blamed themselves, and lost self-esteem. This dynamic was followed by a period of resignation, and the cycle repeated. The cycle terminated when the rationalizations were exhausted and learned helplessness fully manifested. The fourth theme, escalation, represented the intensification of abuse when the participants reasserted some control and attempted to terminate the relationship. The final theme, resilience and reconnection, represented the reawakening and emergence of the participants' self-worth and their desire to provide a better life for their children and find joy in their lives.

What became fundamentally clear is that domestic violence does not discriminate; it can affect anyone, of any age, race, creed, religion, education level, or socioeconomic status. When the social ecologies in which these women lived were analyzed, profound

differences in the three populations' social-ecological systems were revealed. The Russian population grew up in structured homes with little affection, high expectations, no violence, no drug abuse, male domination, and both biological parents in the home and married. The African American population grew up in homes where domestic violence and drug abuse were present, moving frequently was common, women were the source of strength, neighborhoods were middle-class, and the biological father was not consistently involved in their lives. The Hispanic population grew up in environments where women were expected to be subservient to men, marriage was a forever commitment, poverty was common, education for women was not valued, domestic violence was commonly accepted, and women were mothers before they were anything else. While this is just a sampling of these three populations' social ecologies, what it does demonstrate is that domestic violence is both agnostic and nondiscriminatory. It is a disease that can plague anyone, at any time, and in any situation. There is no predictor or profile that can definitively identify who will and who will not be a victim at some point in her lifetime.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences and needs of battered women in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County in order to raise awareness of the need to address perceived access barriers to services and reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in these Sacramento County–based communities. The driving force behind this study is the results of studies showing that the prevalence of domestic violence among these races and/or ethnicities is disproportionate to the population size in the United States. Furthermore, these populations are less likely to seek services because most victim services are geared toward the "universal woman" who is White, American, and middle-class.

In an attempt to understand what factors contribute to these populations' resistance to seeking services, a phenomenological method was used to explore and understand the experience of domestic violence within the context of these women's lives. Based on the literature, the social systems that surrounded these women from their childhood years to when they experienced abuse as adults appeared to influence how women from these populations interpreted, reacted to, and handled the abuse in their lives (Belsky, 1980; Dutton, 1994; Heise 1998; Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012). It is these social systems that establish a woman's context. For this study, Bronfenbrenner's (1977; 1986) a social-ecological model (SEM) was used as the framework for constructing a social ecology for each population, and the concept of intersectionality was applied in order to

construct the interview questions and to deepen the study's understanding of the complex identities of the study's participants (Crenshaw, 1991).

Using snowball sampling and referrals, a total of 11 participants out of 16 potential candidates were identified. Three Russian, five African American, and three Hispanic females (of Mexican descent) participated in the study. Single interviews, which lasted from one to two hours, were conducted in private locations with each participant. During the interviews, a semistructured approach was employed based on a protocol of questions that were tailored specifically to gather data on the context in which these three populations lived and how the interactions of the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems defined their experience with domestic violence. The questions also explored the textural and structural experiences of domestic violence. More specifically, the participants shared what type of abuse they experienced and how they experienced the abuse.

After the data were collected and transcribed, for each population significant statements were extracted, assigned meaning units, and from these meaning units, distilled into a series of common themes. Data were also extracted in order to construct both childhood and adult social-ecological models for each population. After this was completed for each population, themes were compared and common themes were identified across the three populations.

What was discovered was that the textural aspects of domestic violence are consistent across all three populations. All three populations experienced varying degrees of physical, psychological, economic, emotional, and sexual abuse. The emotions and actions resulting from experiencing abuse were also similar and were

captured into five primary themes: surrender, concealment, learned helplessness, escalation, and reconnection and resilience. The structural aspect of how the women psychologically, emotionally, and physically grappled with the abuse varied, which was attributed to their social-ecological models.

It was determined that the adult exosystems within which these women resided contradicted the outer macrosystems. Specifically, the macrosystems that contained the laws, policies, legislation, and protection for victims of domestic violence, including non-U.S. citizens, seemed to have minimal, if any, impact on the participants' interpretations, reactions, decision-making processes, and outcomes once they experienced abuse. This is because the systems to address domestic violence in the macrosystem were based on the micro-, meso-, and exosystems of the "universal woman." The micro-, meso-, and exosystems of the universal woman do not address the unique needs, circumstances, and factors that exist in non-White/non-U.S. native social ecologies. In addition, other factors, such as discrimination and deportation, within the macrosystems loomed larger than and overshadowed the protections available to these women.

The study is concluded with three recommendations: addressing the exosystems specifically through community ambassador programs, public school programs, and church programs; implementing long-term advocacy programs for victims who complete domestic violence treatment programs; and modifying treatment programs to incorporate an understanding of the victim's exosystem, in addition to her microsystem.

Conclusions

The following narrative contains the answers to the three research questions that this study was intended to address.

Question One: What is a woman's experience of domestic violence in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in Sacramento County?

Across the three populations, physical, psychological, emotional, economic, and sexual abuse was experienced. The severity of the abuse varied and tended to worsen over time. For some participants, the abuse especially intensified upon their attempts to terminate the relationship. Ten of the 11 participants had no advanced warning that their intimate partners were abusive, and thus the participants were often shocked and bewildered by their circumstances. Five themes emerged from the experiences of abuse: surrender, concealment, learned helplessness, escalation, and resilience and reconnection.

The surrender theme represented the participants' loss of control. Whether it happened slowly and methodically or immediately upon marriage, the participants felt that their ability to make decisions was usurped by their abusers. This surrender was sometimes a result of the participants' beliefs that their abusers were acting out of concern and love for them versus wanting to control and dominate them. In other cases, the surrender was automatic and expected once the marriage was finalized.

The next theme was concealment. All participants consciously decided to conceal the abuse from their friends, family, community, church, and law enforcement. This concealment was partly due to the desire to keep up appearances so that those external to their immediate microsystems would believe that all was well in the lives of these participants.

The third theme was learned helplessness. It was determined that learned helplessness followed a cycle in which the degree of learned helplessness intensified with every iteration of the cycle. The cycle is shown in Figure 5.1 below:

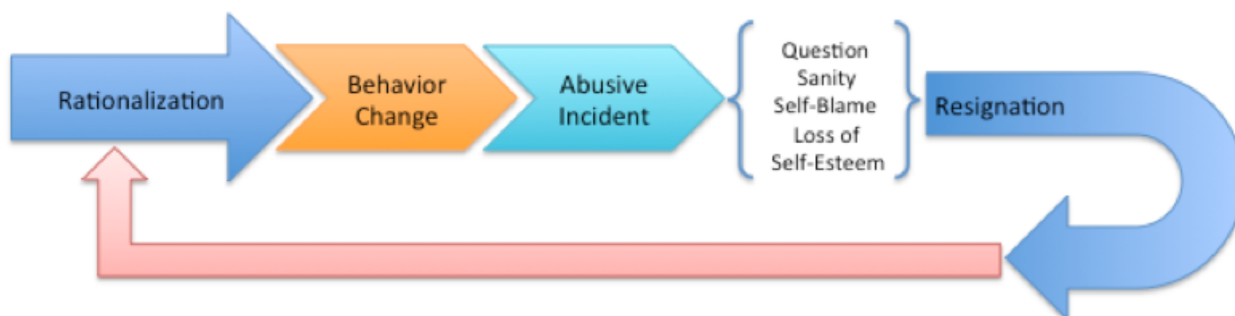

Figure 5.1: The cycle of learned helplessness.

The cycle begins with the rationalization for the abuse, which includes justifying the abuser's behavior. In an effort to avoid the abuse in the future, the participants adjusted their behavior to accommodate the needs of their abusers. When the behavioral modification failed to prevent further abuse, the participants questioned their sanity, blamed themselves, and lost their self-esteem. This was followed by a period of resignation, in which learned helplessness started to build. This cycle repeated until the participants exhausted all rationalizations and learned helplessness had fully set in, leaving the participants in a constant state of resignation. In this state of resignation the participants determined that regardless of their actions, the abuse would continue.

The fourth theme was escalation. This theme was especially pronounced in the Russian and Hispanic communities. When the participants attempted to assert themselves, retrieve some of their control, and/or terminate the relationship, the abuse often intensified. In some cases, the participants never experienced physical violence until they attempted to end the relationship. The intensification consisted of increased threats of violence, threats of killing, threats of killing the participants' children, threats of deportation, and severe physical injuries.

The fifth and final theme was reconnection and resilience. Three subthemes existed within this theme. The first was identification as a mother. Ten out of the 11 participants had children during their abusive incidents, and consistently the desire to protect their children was a significant factor compelling these participants to eliminate the abuse from their lives. This was especially pronounced in the Russian and Hispanic communities. The second subtheme was the emergence of an inner source of strength and resilience. Many of these participants were stripped of their self-respect and dignity. It was at some of the lowest and darkest points in these participants' lives that their self-worth and desire to survive and thrive manifested. Finally, when the participants were asked how their experiences had affected their lives, the consistent theme was that they felt more resilient, wiser, stronger, and more confident. To varying degrees, the participants placed value on this part of their lives as experiences that they needed in order to become the strong and independent women they are today.

Question Two: How do the contexts within these communities influence the experience of domestic violence?

For each of the five themes that emerged from the data and were addressed in question one, the themes were analyzed against each population's social-ecological model in order to address question two. What was discovered is that while the actual experiences of domestic violence and resulting emotions were common across the three populations, the reactions to the abuse varied. These variations were attributed to the contexts within which the populations resided as children and then as adults.

Because the Russian and two of the three Hispanic participants were not raised in the United States, their childhood macrosystems were quite different from their adult macrosystems. It was determined that upon the participants' relocation to the United

States, their former macrosystems transitioned into their exosystems, since these populations lived in culturally based communities that upheld the ideologies and values of their former macrosystems. This was not the case for the African American participants, since they were all born and raised in the United States.

Table 5.1 below contains a summary of how the participants experienced and interpreted domestic violence in light of their childhood and adult social-ecological models.

Table 5.1: Summary of how the contextual factors influenced the participants' experiences with abuse.

Themes	Russian	African American	Hispanic
Surrender	• Control was passed from parents to spouse • Never assumed to have control • Community reinforcement that women have no control or authority • Surrender to abuser was expected upon marriage	• African American value: women are sources of strength • Slower pace for gaining control by abusers • Abusers couched control in feelings of "love" and "concern" • Participants consciously gave up control in return for love and security	• Traditional Mexican values: women are mothers and wives • Marriage is forever • Never assumed to have control • Surrender to abuser was expected upon marriage
Concealment	• Not educated on DV • Family matters are private • Community will not accept divorce • No laws in former USSR against DV • Family will support the abuser	• Educated on DV • Concern over judgment by community, given that women are the strength • African American female pride • Institutional racism and discrimination • Distrust of the	• DV was normal • Marriage is forever • Distrust of the police/authorities • Deportation threat • Church does not accept divorce • Parents will not accept divorce • Must keep up

Themes	Russian	African American	Hispanic
	• Women expected to tolerate and adjust • Distrust of police/authorities • Lack of knowledge about services available	police/authorities • Aversion to being alone due to lack of consistent male figure in their lives	appearances to protect children
Learned Helplessness	• Threat of being ostracized from community and family • Belief that women provoke the violence/women are to blame • Self-blame • Rationalization that they must accommodate their abusers because that is what the community expects	• Enduring abuse contradicts belief system that African American women are sources of strength • Cognitive dissonance: values contradicted actions • Rationalized abusers' behavior in an effort to justify actions	• Naturally resigned to circumstances because there is no other option • Expected to accept circumstances • Marriage is forever • Staying and tolerating is what women do
Escalation	• Ostracized by community and family • Masculinity is threatened • Abuser must maintain his reputation as being in control • Abuser receives community, friend, and family support • Community perceives women as unable to survive without a man and	• Men are threatened by a woman's success • Man's inability to provide is source of anger/frustration • Matriarchy clashes with Western-based patriarchy	• Machismo is threatened • Weakening of abuser's control is a threat to his masculinity as a Hispanic male • Increasing independence for female contradicts exosystem values that women are to be dependent

Themes	Russian	African American	Hispanic
	community support		
Reconnection & Resilience	• Identification as a mother and protector of children becomes justification for ending abuse • New feelings of freedom • Grateful for experience because they are stronger, wiser, and more resilient	• Spiritual values awakened • African American female strength reemerges • Natural resilience • Children are major consideration • Grateful for experience because they are stronger, wiser, and more resilient	• Identification as a mother and protector of children becomes reasonable justification for going against traditional values and terminating the relationship • Grateful for experience because they are stronger, wiser, and more resilient

Question 3: How do the individuals from these defined communities perceive accessing services offered by WEAVE?

As written in chapter 4, it was determined during the course of the interviews that asking this question would be inappropriate. It was possible that inquiring about seeking help would somehow be perceived as accusatory and could have left the participants with regret or feelings of having failed. However, one participant in each population did disclose during the interviews that they sought services from WEAVE, and they provided feedback on this experience. The African American participant was grateful for the court advocacy and counseling services that she received from WEAVE and felt that it was one of the best decisions she could have made. However, she did comment that when she contacted the WEAVE crisis line, her experience was negative and had that been her first interaction with WEAVE, it would have likely resulted in her not pursuing WEAVE's counseling and advocacy services.

The Russian participant also contacted the WEAVE crisis line in desperation and found the services unhelpful. Rather, she found that the services did not address her needs and she sought no further services from them. The Hispanic participant also sought services from WEAVE but found the workers insensitive to her needs as a Hispanic female.

In summary, these three women's perception of accessing services was unfortunately more negative than positive. Whether their initial perceptions were negative could not be determined; however, after their interactions with WEAVE, their perceptions became negative in terms of accessing services again. This lead to the conclusion that WEAVE's front-line workers, specifically on the crisis line, treat women the same and are not trained to modify their approaches based on the cultural backgrounds of different populations. Essentially, the front-line workers were using the "universal woman" approach.

Additional Conclusions

It was determined from the totality of the results that, similar to the results from the study by Pinchevsky and Wright (2012), the exosystem in which people reside is a formidable barrier, and regardless of the laws, initiatives, policies, training, and legislation in the macrosystem, unless these efforts can permeate the exosystem, the impact will be minimal in these non-White/non-U.S. native populations.

Furthermore, when these women were examined in regards to the notion of the universal woman, it was discovered that *what* they experience is universal. Pain, fear, shame, self-blame, feelings of resignation, and loss of control, to name a few, are universal feelings and experiences when domestic violence is endured. However, *how*

these participants experience domestic violence is far from universal, and it is here that the universal woman approach to treating victims of domestic violence comes apart. Although the study was able to extract common themes across the populations and build common social-ecological models for each population, there were so many other extraneous factors in the lives of these women as individuals that it was concluded there is no universal Russian, African American or Hispanic woman. Based on this finding, it is further concluded that the universal White, middle-class American woman does not exist, either.

This further leads to the conclusion that the universal woman approach to treating victims of domestic violence is based on treating *what* these women experienced and fails to address *how* they experienced it. Addressing the *what* is important, but *how* women interpret the abuse and their circumstances in light of their sociopolitical and cultural contexts must also be addressed. In the study's assessment, and consistent with the study by Lockhart & Mitchell (2010), treatments that address what a woman experienced when she was abused without considering the multiple contextual factors that impinge on her life are only partially effective. It is crucial that as part of victim treatment the micro-, meso-, and exosystems in which these women reside are considered; otherwise, once their treatment has ended and these women return to their communities, the chances of their experiencing an abusive relationship are increased.

Recommendations

The recommendations from this study are intended to be applicable both to WEAVE and to other domestic violence agencies in the United States; thus, the recommendations are written to be generally applicable. Furthermore, while three

primary recommendations are made, the objective is to implement these recommendations together. Implementing the recommendations in isolation will limit their efficacy, since the common theme among the three primary recommendations is to specifically address a domestic violence victim's social ecology and to provide victims with the ongoing support to live violence-free lives, despite the challenges that exist within their social ecologies.

Exosystems Are the Key

As the results of the data analysis revealed, efforts to eliminate domestic violence in the form of laws, policies, initiatives, and legislation reside in the macrosystem. Exosystems containing elements that contradict the efforts to eliminate domestic violence become barriers to women's ability to learn about what rights and protections are available to them. Therefore, those exosystems that insulate communities from macrosystem efforts to eliminate domestic violence must be infiltrated.

The question, then, becomes, How can domestic violence agencies gain access to communities that are insular, exclusionary, and in many cases, unwilling to accept outsiders with contradictory belief systems? Recommendations on addressing this question are described below.

Community ambassador programs. It is recommended that domestic violence agencies establish a program that recruits, educates, and supports individuals directly from the Russian, African American, Hispanic, and other ethnically based/racially diverse communities to become community ambassadors. The program will train these ambassadors on the laws, policies, initiatives, social-services options, victim programs, and treatments available to domestic violence victims both locally and at the state and national levels. The ambassadors will then be responsible for determining the best

strategy for disseminating this knowledge in their local communities. The ambassadors will present their strategy to the domestic violence agencies, and upon approval, the domestic violence agencies will provide additional support in the form of literature, and, if funding permits, public-service announcements that support the ambassador's strategy. The ambassador will be responsible for execution of the strategy in the local community. The domestic violence agencies will hold a monthly meeting with the ambassadors for information exchange, monitoring, and additional support as needed.

The key to this program is the community ambassadors' ability to disseminate information on domestic violence in a way that resonates with the people in the community. Attention will be paid to respecting norms, customs, and belief systems of both women and men in the community.

In order to execute this strategy, it is recommended that domestic violence agencies execute pilots and choose one to two pilot communities. Furthermore, a series of success criteria for measuring the outcome of the pilot will require definition prior to beginning the pilot. If the pilot is successful and the criteria are met, it is recommended that the domestic violence agencies pursue a grant to fund expansion of the effort. An excellent source for recruitment would be local community colleges, community centers, local colleges and universities, and domestic violence victims who successfully completed treatment programs. Identifying and contacting these individuals would likely be through referrals from a professor, former counselor, or a trusted leader of one of these organizations.

Public school programs. While this study did not address the impact that domestic violence has on children, it is a factor that must be considered, especially in

light of the fact that 10 of the 11 participants had children in the home when the abuse was experienced. Public schools are an excellent source within the exosystem for teaching children about what constitutes a healthy relationship and how conflict can be resolved in a productive manner. Furthermore, teaching children about domestic violence, especially if they are witnessing it at home, may cause children to take action and tell an adult, such as a teacher. Since teachers are mandatory reporters, they would inform social services, and action would be taken to protect the children as and to get the parents assistance in eliminating the violence.

It is recommended that the program not be executed in a single module or on a one-time basis. Rather, the program should be executed in brief "snippets" so that the message that violence in the home is neither healthy nor legal becomes entrenched in the minds of children. It is also recommended that the education be done in an interactive fashion, with the use of role playing or computer-based modules requiring that the students actively engage.

Church programs. To many people churches are sources of truth and absolution. Because of this, a church has tremendous influence within the exosystem. Similar to the community ambassador recommendation, it is recommended that domestic violence agencies connect with local church leaders in their communities and identify ways to offer services to battered women that respect the tenets of the church and the values of the community. It is recommended, similar to the community ambassador program, that a pilot be done first. Specifically, domestic violence agencies will connect with a church leader in the local community that has a congregation of non-White/non-U.S. native individuals and design a strategy for educating the congregation on domestic

violence and offering services to battered women. Such strategies include providing on-site group therapy for battered women, distributing literature, incorporating antiabuse messages into the pastor's sermons, and including the effort to eliminate domestic violence in the church's social justice efforts.

The pilot will consist of a series of evaluation criteria that will be assessed at the pilot's conclusion. If the pilot is successful, domestic violence agencies can expand the program to other church leaders in the local community. It is recommended that the pilot be done concurrently with the community ambassador program pilot so that if both are successful, domestic violence agencies can apply for a funding grant to support both programs.

Follow-Up / Long-Term Advocacy

The study conducted by Sullivan and Bybee (1999) that examined the effect of long-term advocacy and follow-up on domestic violence victims after they complete treatment programs demonstrated that women experienced less violence and reported an increase in the quality of life, more social support, and less depression. Furthermore, the women in this study were equipped with knowledge on how to access resources if they needed help.

While women are in counseling and participating in group therapy for domestic violence, women are better able to grapple with their circumstances and heal. However, eventually the treatment programs end and many women continue to live in or return to the exosystems that accept abusive intimate relationships. This lack of community and family support that women encounter after the complete treatment programs for domestic violence can diminish and ultimately eliminate the beneficial effects of having been in the treatment programs.

Based on what the study revealed in terms of the influence an exosystem exerts on a woman, it is recommended that domestic violence agencies develop a program for long-term advocacy after women complete the treatment program. The advocacy program would be optional for women who completed treatment and would consist of a scheduled monthly follow-up meeting at an agreed-on safe location and access to the advocate or the advocate's back-up on an ad-hoc basis in the case of crisis. The advocate will provide ongoing emotional support and access to resources as necessary in support of the woman living a violence-free life. This long-term support would continue for a period of two years.

For women who successfully complete the two-year program, it is recommended that domestic violence agencies attempt to recruit them to become advocates themselves. It is also recommend that domestic violence agencies pilot this program in a similar fashion to the community ambassador and church programs.

Address the Victim's Social Ecology

Allen et al. (2013) conducted a follow-up study to Sullivan and Bybee's (1999) study in order to identify which aspects of the service delivery process contributed the most to the participants' successful outcomes. The study identified the program's orientation toward addressing the whole person and developing a comprehensive treatment plan that recognized the contexts within which these women lived as the most significant critical success factor (Allen et al., 2013).

It is recommended that as part of a domestic violence agency's treatment program, modifications are made to intake assessments and treatment so that both take into account the elements within the woman's microsystem *and* exosystem. Most intake assessments are focused on the microsystem, which makes sense, given that the abuse

occurs in the microsystem. However, understanding the exosystem will inform the domestic violence agency's counselors and advocates on what the best treatment options are and who the most suited counselor/advocate is. In addition, understanding the exosystem will help the domestic violence agency's counselors and advocates understand the decision making and thought processes of the victim. Finally, as a add-on to the recommendation for long-term advocacy, advocates will understand the environments to which these women are returning and how to help these women navigate violence-free lives in environments that may support contradictory beliefs.

Conclusion

When I started this study, I thought that because I worked on the crisis line, volunteered, and was a board member at WEAVE I understood domestic violence. As difficult as it is for me to admit, like many people, I still often wondered to myself, "Why didn't they just leave?" However, what I failed to understand is that leaving does not equal just leaving an abusive relationship and environment; for many, it means abandoning an entire life. Several of the participants were faced not only with leaving someone they loved and were committed to, but also many times with leaving their families, their communities, their church, their friends, and their own identities. Everything these women believed to be true from the time they were children up until the point they decided whether to leave the abusive relationship became questionable. What I learned is that "just leaving" concept implies that domestic violence can be resolved in one simple action. The reality is, domestic violence is complex and applying a simple solution to a complex problem is both naive and insulting to the women who find themselves in these circumstances. As Heise (1998) wrote: "The task of theory building

has been severely hampered by the narrowness of traditional academic disciplines and the tendency . . . to advance single-factor theories rather than explanations that reflect the full complexity and messiness of life" (p. 262).

A key part of Heise's (1998) quote is "the full complexity and messiness of life" (p. 262). Life is messy for everyone. As we grow older, our social ecologies become increasingly complex and our attachment to our social ecologies becomes stronger. That is why I feel compelled to honor the women in this study. Amid the messiness of their lives, the pain, the fear, and the hopelessness, these women were able to rise above their circumstances and transform their experiences into sources of strength and wisdom. To me, the women in this study are a testament to the strength of the enduring human spirit: our will to survive, be happy, and experience joy. I believe that Cassiopeia's (personal interview, November 16, 2013) reflection sums it up best: "You deserve better. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. There's a reason that you were made. And you weren't made to be somebody's punching bag."

APPENDIX A: General Interview Protocol

Please note: This protocol is a guide intended to remind the interviewer to collect specific data; however, because of the sensitive nature of the interview, the protocol likely will not be followed in sequence or the questions asked as written; the questions asked and the sequence will be based on the cadence established by the interviewee.

Interview Protocol Project: Exploring How Domestic Violence Is Experienced in the <<insert community here>> in Sacramento County

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee: <<assign pseudonym>>

Ethnicity/Race:

Interviewee Position (physical location during interview):

Open session by reminding the interviewee:

- Purpose of the study: to understand the unique experiences and needs of battered women in the Russian, African American, and Hispanic communities in order to raise awareness of the need to address perceived access barriers to services and reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in these Sacramento County–based communities.

- Length of the interview: 120 minutes.

- Remind interviewee that all information is confidential and that no real names will be included in the study.

[Turn on sound recording device.]

Questions (for probing):

1. Please tell me about your background.
    a. Birthplace
    b. Hometown(s)
    c. Parents/guardians
    d. Brothers/sisters
    e. Family values raised with /messaging
    f. Home life/environment

2. Please describe your community affiliations, such as church, ethnic groups, and so on.
    a. Beliefs (identify source)
    b. Value system (identify source)

3. Redirect to: Please describe the significant relationships in your life, such as with boyfriends, partners, and spouses.
    a. Children (with whom)

4. In which relationship(s) did you experience abuse (explore circumstances/context):
    a. Age
    b. Location/living circumstances
    c. Employment status
    d. Economic status
    e. Proximity to family/friends
    f. Child status
    g. Term of relationship

5. Explore details of abuse:
    a. Type of abuse: physical, mental, emotional, sexual, economic
    b. Frequency
    c. Duration
    d. Patterns
    e. Triggers
    f. Severity

6. Do you recall particular physical sensations?
    a. Bodily sensation (e.g., stomach pains, dizziness)
    b. Smell
    c. Hearing
    d. Taste
    e. Vision

7. Please describe how you felt emotionally.

8. Please describe what was going through your mind.
    a. Memories

b. Messages

9. If you spoke with family/friends/community members/pastor about the abuse, what did they tell you?
    a. Advice
    b. Messages

10. What did you think of the advice and counsel you were given (if any)?

11. If you engaged law enforcement, the legal system, and/or social services, what was your experience?
    a. Treatment
    b. Support
    c. Responsiveness

12. What factors influenced your decision making on what actions to take (if any)?
    a. Family
    b. Community
    c. Church
    d. Law Enforcement/legal services/social services

13. What, if any, domestic violence services did you seek?
    a. Explore whether services at WEAVE were sought
    b. Knowledge of WEAVE

14. What was your experience in accessing services at WEAVE?

15. In reflection, what meaning/impact did this experience have on you and your life?
    a. Explore the meaning and significance that the interviewee applies to this period in her life

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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