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**An Examination of a Probation Department's Domestic Violence Unit**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Rebecca Marie Bonanno**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

Social Welfare

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Abstract of the Dissertation

An Examination of a Probation Department Domestic Violence Unit

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Intervention programs for batterers have become a mainstay of the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence perpetration. Dozens of evaluations of such programs have been carried out in the last two decades yet many questions remain about the processes through which these interventions are carried out and their outcomes in terms of criminal recidivism and victim and community safety.

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of a batterer intervention program provided by a local probation department's specialized domestic violence unit in conjunction with a community domestic violence agency. Using a combined qualitative and quantitative approach including data from nonparticipant observation, interviews, and case record review, the process and outcomes of service delivery were examined. Results found no program effect in terms of program completion and recidivism for 77 probationers who were sentenced to probation and received intervention services during 2004 and 2005. Analysis revealed that emotion management is a crucial activity of service providers of the intervention. Impression management and narrative theories elucidate the probation experiences of the participants as examined through the stories they tell about themselves.

Policy recommendations include the increased use of motivational techniques in batterer intervention programs, improved data collection by local service providers, and continued research on successful interventions in this field.

## **Dedication**

For Leidy Sheeder Bonanno (1981-2003), daughter, sister, cousin, niece, friend, nurse,  
who we lost too soon.

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

This study is a combined quantitative and qualitative description of a subunit of a local Department of Probation and its participants. This subunit, the Suffolk County Probation Domestic Violence (DV) Unit, provides intensive probation supervision and intervention services to male domestic violence offenders for the purposes of increased community safety and offender accountability. This unit is not unlike thousands of others throughout the United States which have become crucial elements of the criminal justice system's response to crimes of domestic violence. Also like many others, Suffolk's DV Unit is providing services with only anecdotal evidence of its effectiveness. This study incorporates case record, observation, and interview data to produce in-depth descriptions of the DV Unit's probationers and service delivery. Recidivism outcomes of a cohort of DV Unit probationers are also examined.

### ***Background of the Problem***

#### **Domestic Violence**

Increasingly since the 1970s, domestic violence has been considered a serious and widespread social, criminal justice, health, and mental health problem (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003; American Psychological Association, 1999; National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). The United States Department of Justice has reported, based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of households, that almost 700,000 nonfatal violent crimes were committed against intimate partners in 2001. About 85% of these victimizations were against women (Rennison, 2003). The consequences of abuse among intimate partners include fatal and nonfatal physical injury and illness, psychological impairment, and significant economic costs (Centers for Disease Control, 2003). In 2003, the United States Surgeon General spoke out against family violence, describing it as "a serious public health issue" (Carmona, 2003).

With an increased awareness about the severity of the domestic violence problem in our society has come a responsibility on the part of service providing systems, such as the criminal justice and health care systems, to protect victims and respond to abusive

behavior. As such, large-scale reforms have been made to change the way society deals with this problem. Such reforms include the passing of the Violence Against Women Act (1994) and its subsequent enhancements, which include federal legislation to improve criminal justice and community based responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking through the establishment of domestic violence hotlines and shelters, prevention programs, research and advocacy centers, and training and awareness programs at the state and local levels to confront the biases of institutions and individuals in authority against victims of domestic violence. Though the systems through which victims and abusers pass are still far from perfect, great advances have been made so that domestic violence does not go unnoticed or unpunished.

### **Interventions with Batterers**

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the institutional recognition of domestic violence in the United States is criminalization. It is no longer legally or philosophically acceptable for police officers to let batterers off with a warning or walk them around the block to “cool off”; most states now have laws that require police to immediately arrest domestic violence perpetrators. Mandatory arrest policies have brought huge numbers of domestic violence perpetrators into the criminal justice system, leaving judges and district attorneys with the problem of what to do with them. Although many victims’ advocates are leery of any intervention that seeks to “cure” batterers of their violence, it was a group of such advocates who created the first Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP’s) to teach batterers about their own violence and to hold them accountable for it. These programs are now a major element of the criminal justice system’s response to domestic violence. For the most part, BIP’s and other criminal justice policies and interventions have as their foundation a set of principles that together can be referred to as the feminist domestic violence ideology. These principles are:

- Domestic violence is a crime. It is not the result of individual characteristics of the batterer, such as mental health problems, past trauma or victimization, substance abuse, impulse control, or neuropsychological problems. Interventions that focus on individual problems excuse the batterer’s behavior rather than hold him accountable for it.

- Men are the primary perpetrators of domestic violence. When women are violent against men, it is usually in self-defense and inflicts little harm or injury.
- Domestic violence is always the batterer's fault and never the victim's fault. Couples counseling or other interventions that implicate the female victim or the dynamics of the relationship should be prohibited.
- Anger management is not an appropriate intervention for batterers because anger does not cause domestic violence. If anger were the problem, batterers would have trouble controlling their anger in all social interactions, rather than just those with female partners.
- Domestic violence escalates over time from less dangerous behaviors like verbal abuse and pushing to more dangerous actions like beating and the use of weapons.
- Men who commit domestic violence often use a variety of manipulative and threatening tactics (i.e. financial abuse and isolation) to maintain control over their victims (see figure 1).

These principles are not universally embraced in the domestic violence field. Many psychologists and social workers providing services to batterers believe that therapeutic interventions- not just recognition of and accountability for violence- are necessary if some abusive men are ever to function in society. Feminist domestic violence advocates have responded by criticizing the focus on micro-level changes at the expense of macro-level social changes (Davis, 1987).

Nevertheless, the principles of the feminist domestic violence ideology are at the heart of BIPs. A program developed by a group of domestic violence advocates in Duluth, MN has become the most widely used model for BIPs. The Duluth Model, as it is known, includes a psycho-educational curriculum called *Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter* (The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (n.d.) which involves confronting abusive men about their violent behavior and its consequences, teaching them that their behavior stems from a desire to control their female partners, and



encouraging them to take responsibility for controlling their behavior. The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (n.d.) describes the curriculum as follows:

A central assumption is that nature and culture are separate. Men are cultural beings who can change because abusive behavior is cultural, not innate. Facilitators engage men in dialogue about what they believe about men, women, marriage and children. Curriculum exercises engage men in critical thinking, and self-reflection; identify the contradictions; and explore alternatives to abuse.

**Chart 2. Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993)**



Many BIPs incorporate into their programs elements of other approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral techniques. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is based on the idea that a person's thoughts, and not external events, cause our feelings and behavior (National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, n.d.) In the context of batterers intervention, cognitive-behavioral approach helps the batterer to identify and control the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that lead him to abusive behavior. The Duluth Model is often described as a feminist-based cognitive-behavioral approach to intervention with batterers.

### **Why study BIPs?**

Since the 1990s, scores of evaluations of BIPs had been published in academic journals. While methodological issues have made the results somewhat controversial (see Gondolf, 2006), the general consensus among social scientists who have studied the issue is that BIPs show little success in reducing recidivism among domestic violence perpetrators (recidivism being the primary indicator of program effectiveness). Despite these results, BIPs continue to be the most widespread approach to addressing domestic violence in the criminal justice system.

Without significant reason to be hopeful that these interventions are making domestic violence victims and the general public safer, why do BIPs continue to expand and remain the mainstay of the criminal justice system's approach? The answer may be that no better approach seems to exist. And so, it appears that BIPs will continue to serve hundreds of thousands of domestic violence offenders indefinitely.

My motivation for conducting this study is this: If BIPs continue to exist, researchers must continue to study them. There is still much that is unknown in this field of inquiry. Despite voluminous data from quasi-experimental and experimental studies of BIPs, little is known about exactly what types of activities and processes are taking place inside the many diverse batterer intervention groups throughout the country. More process-oriented quantitative and qualitative research has been conducted to try to get at the subtleties that may be missed by outcome studies (Dalton, 2001; Eckhardt, Babcock & Homack, 2004; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). This study provides an in-depth

description of one particular BIP, one with specific elements that make it unique among programs of its kind.

### **The Suffolk County Probation Domestic Violence Unit**

In Suffolk County, NY, an economically, racially, and ethnically diverse suburb of New York City located on Long Island, the Department of Probation has developed a program of intervention for men on probation for domestic violence crimes. The DV Unit's goal is to hold offenders accountable for their behavior through intensive supervision and participation in psycho-educational and cognitive-behavioral intervention groups. The DV Unit serves up to 150 men at a time who have pled guilty to or been convicted of a domestic violence-related crime. These men participate in any of eight groups in locations throughout the county led by professionally trained counselors and Suffolk County probation officers. They are each mandated to attend one group session per week for 52 weeks, a period longer than most BIPs nationwide. The intervention is similar to the Duluth Model in that the offenders learn from group leaders about the roots of violence against women in a patriarchal society and to confront the causes and consequences of their own behavior.

In addition to group attendance, participants receive intensive supervision, which includes frequent home visits by their designated probation officer and regular urine testing for drug and alcohol use. Offenders are subject to the combination of ongoing and intensive probation monitoring as well as weekly group sessions where their probation officers are present. Unlike any other probation domestic violence program documented in the literature, the Suffolk County DVP has formed an intensely collaborative relationship with a community domestic violence agency, the Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, Inc. (VIBS), to offer groups *co-facilitated by probation officers and domestic violence counselors*. This partnership brings a clinical perspective on probationers' individual and interpersonal limitations and strengths together with a criminal justice perspective on the risks offenders pose to the public and the conditions they must meet while in the probation system. Together, the counselor and the probation officer enact what they describe as an "engage and confront" approach to intervention with batterers; that is, they try to build a respectful rapport with the probationers (engage)

while firmly insisting that the probationers take personal responsibility for their abusive pasts (confront). The combined clinical/criminal justice approach enables group facilitators to address the psychosocial and behavioral factors that often contribute to domestic violence, such as sexist attitudes about women and the desire to maintain power and control in a relationship, while simultaneously holding probationers accountable for their criminal acts and reinforcing the need for compliance with the conditions of their probation.

### **Purpose of the Research and Significant Questions**

The purpose of this study is:

- To describe the probationers who receive intervention in the Domestic Violence Unit;
- To describe the process through which intervention services are delivered; and
- To examine the outcomes of probationers who received DV Unit intervention.

#### Research Questions

1. What are some of the demographic, socioeconomic, and personal characteristics of the offenders in the DV Unit?
2. What are the processes through which intervention services are delivered?
3. What are the outcomes of offenders who participate in the DV Unit's services for one year?
4. Are offender's outcomes related to any of the demographic and/or personal characteristics identified?
5. What are the subjective experiences of the offenders in the DV Unit?
6. How do the offenders perceive the services provided by the DV Unit?
7. What are the offenders' perceptions of themselves as probationers in the DV Unit?
8. How do offenders' perceptions of themselves and the program differ from official reports made by professionals (probation officers, counselors) in records and interviews?

It is intended that the combination of individual and group, qualitative and quantitative data will contribute some insight into who domestic abusers are and what batterer intervention is like. More locally, the results of this study will provide Suffolk County Probation with tangible information that it may use to inform practices and services. All counties struggle for scarce resources at the local, state, and federal levels and, for that reason, it is increasingly important that localities are able to document who they are serving and how they are serving them in order to substantiate a need for greater funding. The county will be able to use the data obtained in this study to assess their current programming for domestic violence offenders, determine needs and gaps in services, and apply for grants for continued or expanded service provision. Most importantly, the results of this study will assist the Probation Department in improving services to offenders, thereby increasing the safety of victims and the community.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### *Domestic Violence in Historical Context*

In the last three decades, domestic violence has been transformed from a socially-accepted (though covert) practice to an identified social problem, and eventually to the multidisciplinary field of research, policy, practice, and discourse that it is now. Women's activism and advocacy informed by feminist theory can accept most of the credit for this change. A multitude of policies and practices have been developed based on the concept that women have the right to be protected from violence and coercion at the hands of their male intimate partners. There is currently little debate that violence against women in the home is no longer acceptable in our society. Nevertheless, the problem of domestic violence persists in many thousands of households (an estimated 1 in 320 in 2005) throughout the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.). Despite the impressive influence of feminist activism on legislation, policy, and intervention, the problem of domestic violence has not gone away.

Before the 1970's, "wife beating" was considered a private matter to be kept within the family. Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when it became illegal in most states for a man to physically abuse his wife, battering was tolerated by society and remained largely outside of the public discourse. When it was discussed, both the popular and academic views of the issue implicated the wife in her own abuse, generally suggesting that she was masochistic and provoked the violence against her (Schechter, 1982; Davis, 1987). With the birth of the Women's Movement, however, a door was opened for challenging patriarchal systems, the ideals of femininity, and the conventional roles of women.

The Women's Liberation Movement challenged the conventional split between the private, domestic world and the previously male-only public world, arguing that it no longer made sense in the modern social context. One issue that feminist activists brought out of the private sphere was rape, and, consequently, an anti-rape movement emerged to provide services to victims and call attention to the problem. In a comprehensive and classic book, *Women and Male Violence*, Susan Schechter (1982) charts the history of the Battered Women's Movement and credits the Anti-rape movement with laying a crucial

foundation for battered women and their advocates. The Anti-rape Movement, Schechter writes, created an example of effective feminist organizing around an issue and it was the first group to discuss violence against women as a mechanism of male domination. The movement challenged myths about rape, exposed the biases and apathy of the criminal justice system toward sexual violence, and made explicit women's individual and collective intolerance for violence against them.

Sexual violence against women had emerged from the private psyches of victims to be defined as a social problem, making way for wife battering to creep out of the domestic sphere as well. Women began to articulate the connection between rape and violence in the home and to apply the same theories of male domination and institutional sexism to identify wife abuse as a social rather than individual problem. With this, the Battered Women's Movement began.

The Battered Women's Movement, like all social movements, was not driven by the results of carefully designed and implemented studies as social policies are typically created. Rather, it emerged from a belief that there was an alternative to the painful conditions abused women suffered and an angry and passionate desire for change. When women got together in consciousness-raising groups and discovered that many of them were victims of their husbands and boyfriends, their reaction was not to study the problem, it was to act.

As the Movement grew and spread around the country, women began to form statewide coalitions which focused on creating shelters and other services for victims but also on reforming state legislation regarding wife abuse. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) was created in 1978 to link the state coalitions. As vocal and visible forces of the Battered Women's Movement, these coalitions emphasized not just the brutality abused women endured but also the indifference of societal institutions to their plight. Activists worked at changing social attitudes about wife abuse and providing concrete services to victims in need. These activists tried to convey that wife abuse was not about a man's anger, jealousy, or drinking problem, but about his desire or need to control his wife or girlfriend. They publicly shared stories and dispelled sexist

myths about abuse in the home and gained public support and media attention (Schechter, 1982; Davis, 1991).

Soon domestic violence shelters began receiving needed funds from state and federal sources. Though many shelters were staffed by volunteers, full-time workers were necessary for day-to-day management and for fighting the battles with local zoning boards, welfare departments, and neighbors who resisted housing abused women in their communities (Schechter, 1982). Workers and advocates applied for and received government and foundation grants for shelter operations and the provision of casework, counseling, and other services to abused women. Advocacy and direct services to abused women were also being funded. In very tangible and important ways, the Battered Women's Movement was thriving.

However, with this success came the intrusion of institutional forces on what had been a grassroots, feminist, and victim-led movement. As the issue of wife abuse gained legitimacy, mutual support was increasingly being replaced by professionally-provided "victims' services". A movement which grew out of resistance to hierarchical, male-created social structures now had to answer to the traditional standards of government and other funders.

Abused women who themselves had been instrumental in organizing and protesting for change and women who came to the issue of abuse through feminist activism were feeling that *their movement* had been co-opted by passionless institutions. The terms "wife abuse" and "battering" were gradually being replaced by the gender-neutral "spousal abuse" and "domestic violence". The shift toward apolitical and clinical descriptions of wife abuse bothered feminist activists who for decades had carried the message that the personal is political. It seemed that the Battered Women's Movement had been sanitized and the more radical feminist politics were moved to the fringes.

Not all participants of the Movement, however, were bothered by these developments; many felt that increased recognition and legitimization of the issue could only help the hundreds of thousands of abused women in the country. The goals, they felt, were to provide services, push for protective legislation, and create safe spaces for



abused women. Changing the political lens through which society views violence against women was not a priority for all Battered Women's activists.

What began as a social movement is now a field of inquiry and practice in which thousands of professionals specialize. Researchers, therapists, advocates, policy-makers, and theorists abound in a multitude of agencies, organizations, laboratories, and government offices created expressly to address issues of domestic violence. Some domestic violence advocates lament the decline of the Battered Women's Movement that has accompanied the institutional support given to the prevention of violence against women. One such advocate writes,

We all know (wife beating) exists, and yet like other intractable social problems, it has disappeared into an increasingly 'naturalized' warp of social ills whose activist voices have become increasingly part of the social welfare state apparatus, the social services establishment, or the towers of academic research. As a significant and widely acknowledged 'social problem', 'domestic violence' has become increasingly domesticated and mainstreamed (Meyer, 2001).

Despite this type of criticism, it is clear that many advocates working in more "mainstream" domestic violence organizations are still guided by some of the principles of the Battered Women's Movement. The leading organization for domestic violence advocacy, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, believes violence against women and children results from the use of force or threat to achieve and maintain control over others in intimate relationships, and from societal abuse of power and domination. The organization, therefore, focuses on the major societal changes necessary to eliminate both personal and societal violence against all women and children. (NCADV, no date.)

Organizations like NCADV have influenced much of the legislation and policies that have been created to respond to domestic violence in the last fifteen years or more. The public education which also been a part of domestic violence advocates' work has gradually turned the tide of public opinion about the acceptability of violence against women. Services now exist to provide shelter, emotional and psychological support,

health care, protection and other necessities to women and children who are victims of abuse.

### ***Who Are Domestic Violence Perpetrators?***

Advocates and educators often remind the public that domestic violence is not a problem found only among particular racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups. Without doubt, batterers are a heterogeneous group. However, the abusive men who enter the criminal justice system are likely to have multiple health, mental health, and social problems. Studies of BIP participants have indicated that half experience difficulties with substance abuse, a quarter are afflicted with significant (Axis I or II) mental health disorders, and more than half have prior criminal histories (Gondolf, 1996; Dalton, 2001). According to Gondolf's 1996 study, one third had been raised by parents with substance abuse problems, a quarter reported have been harmed by their parents as children, and nearly half witnessed a parent hit the other parent. One longitudinal study of domestic violence perpetrators in Massachusetts found that the vast majority of those charged with domestic violence crimes had multiple past crimes, leading the authors to conclude that, "Domestic violence charges are just part of much more extensive and wide-ranging criminal histories" (Wilson & Klein, 2006, iii).

In seeking to better understand who batterers are and why they are abusive, researchers have looked to individual differences in personality, psychological states, beliefs, and behaviors. In the last decade, typological research on batterers has become a prominent part of the clinical literature and has provided insight into the etiological underpinnings of domestic violence as well as suggestions for potential interventions (Capaldi & Kim, 2007). One of the most well-known of the batterer typologies was developed by Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) and identifies three dimensions on which batterers differ: frequency/severity of violence, generality of violence (family only or including nonfamily), and psychopathology. Along these dimensions lie three subgroups of batterers: generally violent/antisocial, dysphoric/borderline, and family only. Johnson's (1995) typology, in which he identified two subgroups of batterers, has been influential both clinically and theoretically. In looking at the frequency and severity of violence and at the batterer's motivation for abuse, Johnson has proposed subtypes

which can explain both the male-specific, seemingly gender-motivated violence commonly seen by domestic violence advocates in community agency settings as well as the lower-level, mutual violence in couples that is frequently reported in large-scale general population surveys. Consistent with the representation of the “typical” abuser—a man who uses violence against a woman to maintain control over her—is Johnson’s “intimate terrorist”, the victim of whom is subjected to more severe and frequent violence and is likely to require the services of a community agency or shelter for safety. Less severe and frequent violence between men and women Johnson calls “common couple violence”. This type of behavior has been widely reported in surveys of people who are not involved in the criminal justice system or recipients of community services as either victims or perpetrators. Other researchers have developed typologies of batterers based on variables such as physiological reactivity during marital conflict (Gottman, et al, 1995) and personality profiles derived from the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (White & Gondolf, 2000). Studies testing and validating each of the described typologies abound in the literature with little agreement among researchers in the field as to the most accurate and useful way to categorize batterers.

### ***Batterer Intervention Programs***

BIPs throughout the country are influenced by the Duluth Model but vary in length and intensity, format, and emphasis. Some programs are strictly educational and are delivered in lecture format with little discussion, whereas others rely more on group interaction and process to move batterers toward taking responsibility for their abusive behaviors. BIPs can range in length from sixteen weeks to more than one year. Most of these interventions are offered by community-based agencies, some of which also provide services to victims of abuse. BIPs typically do not receive federal or state funding and instead are self-sustaining through the collection of participant fees. Payment by group participants is thought by some to be an additional method of holding batterers accountable for their actions. The self-sustainability of the programs through participant payment also helps BIPs avoid accusations that their services to batterers divert public funds away from services for victims, a charge that women’s advocates have leveled in the past.

Many states—thirty, at last count—have developed standards by which those BIPs receiving referrals from government agencies will operate. Content analyses of these state standards (Austin & Dankwort, 1998, Maiuro, et al, 2001) have revealed the various degrees to which states seek to control the content, format, and delivery of services to batterers. Standards in some states are voluntary, but in others are mandated through oversight and/or specific legislation (Maiuro, et al, 2001). The most consistent elements of the state standards for BIPs pertained to the modality in which services are to be provided, specifically in groups (90% of states emphasized or required the group modality and 43% specifically preclude couples treatment) (Maiuro, et al, 2001). Other domains of batterer’s treatment specified in state standards include program length, education and training of facilitators, philosophy, intake procedures, and completion criteria (Austin & Dankwort, 1998).

Some states, like New York, have declined to create standards, stating that the principles guiding batterer intervention should remain fluid as new information and understanding about these services emerge (NYS Office of the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2006). New York State does, however, strongly endorse a model of batterer intervention—one that has come to be known as the New York Model, which emphasizes batterer accountability in the context of the criminal justice system and de-emphasizes batterer services as treatment for individual pathologies. One of the primary goals of the New York Model is “to create and promote a batterer program that supports the social change efforts of the Battered Women’s Movement” (OPDV, 2006, 37). The Model’s guiding principles include:

- Domestic violence is rooted in the historical precedent that accepted men controlling their female partners.
- Only court-mandated participants are enrolled.
- Batterers’ programs exist as part of a coordinated community response to domestic violence.
- Batterers’ programs are educational classes, not treatment.
- To view batterers programs as treatment or rehabilitation is to suggest that battering is the result of a pathology.

- While the NY Model asserts that individual men can change their behavior, there is no reliable evidence to suggest that a class is an effective mechanism for change.

The New York Model of Batterer Intervention is controversial among criminal justice and mental health professionals.

### ***The Evaluation Literature***

Because of the widespread use of BIPs as sanctions for crimes of domestic violence, it is crucial to examine the outcomes which result from these programs. Unfortunately, results of BIPs evaluations do not provide a clear answer about their effectiveness. While some evaluations have employed quasi-experimental designs and have found small positive effects (Palmer, et al, 1992; Tutty, et al, 2001), others, like the experimental studies of programs Broward County, FL and Brooklyn, NY, carried out by the National Institute of Justice, concluded that batterers who completed the programs showed no differences in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors (Jackson, et al, 2003). In a meta-analytic review of 10 quasi-experimental and experimental evaluations of BIPs, researchers found that official reports (arrests or official complaints made to police) suggested a slight decrease in re-offending after program participation. However, when victims' reports of offender violence were taken into account, these modest effect sizes disappeared (Feder & Wilson, 2005). Studies such as these have been the targets of criticism from both advocates of the Duluth Model and programs like it (Minnesota Program Development, Inc., n.d.) and researchers who have pointed out the methodological problems that are difficult to avoid in program evaluation of this kind. Gondolf (2004), one of the most notable evaluators of batterers programs, has argued that most evaluations have not addressed the problems of differences in implementation across sites, the impact of concurrent criminal justice interventions such as probation supervision and court action, the absence of pure control groups, and the range of participant outcomes that could be viewed as constituting success. In response, Gondolf (2004, p.616) worked with the Centers for Disease Control to design a multi-site evaluation to address these methodological issues; from that study it was concluded that,

“at least some programs are effective in stopping assault and abuse and that batterer intervention in general show some promise”.

Researchers interested in finding out what characteristics increase the likelihood that an abuser will complete and have success in a batterers’ program, have looked at a variety of variables. Most quantitative researchers have defined success in terms of recidivism rates, that is, rates of reassault, as reported by batterers and/or victims, or official reports of rearrest or violations of probation. Risk factors for program drop-out and/or recidivism include unemployment and unstable employment history, being unmarried, young age, criminal history, and substance abuse problems (Baba, et al, 1999; Hanson & Wallace-Cappretta, 2004). Heckert and Goldolf (2004) have attempted to develop a robust model that would help those in the field predict risk of reassault among batterers based on individual characteristics. However, they warn that high risk batterers are not easy to identify and that risk assessment instruments should be used with caution.

### ***What Goes on in Batterer’s Intervention Programs?***

In the absence of national or, in most cases, state regulations directing how or what types of interventions are delivered to batterers, individual programs and agencies are free to develop and provide whatever services they deem most appropriate. As a result, a great deal of variety can be found in the content and delivery of BIPs. Apart from questioning if batterer intervention programs are effective, many researchers are seeking to find out what kinds of activities, interactions, and processes are taking place in the groups and classes throughout the country that describe themselves as BIPs.

The process through which change takes place among batterers in BIPs has been the focus of several qualitative studies (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Scott & Wolf, 2000; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006, MacPhee-Sigurdson, 2004). These authors try to pull apart the processes that are taking place in the batterers group to bring about the hoped for psychological, social, and behavioral changes in its members. Pandya & Gingerich (2002) conducted a microethnography of a group of six BIP group participants and found that the men attributed changes in themselves to gaining greater self-knowledge, acknowledging that they have a problem and identifying what specifically that problem is

(substance abuse, anger, poor communication skills, etc.), and learning new adaptive interpersonal skills. Scott & Wolf (2000) conducted semi-structured interviews with nine men who had changed their abusive behavior according to their own reports and those of their counselors and partners. The researchers identified 21 distinct variables related to change, the most significant of which were: (1) taking responsibility for past behavior, (2) empathy for their victims, (3) reduced dependency, which the authors described as the men's realization that they were self-sufficient and responsible for their own behavior and that their partners were also autonomous individuals with the right to make their own decisions, and (4) communication, in particular, learning conflict management and resolution skills and developing the better listening abilities.

Silvergleid & Mankowski (2006) interviewed nine batterer's group participants and ten facilitators to identify and describe key change processes. They broke their findings down into four categories:

- (1) Community-level and extratherapeutic influences, including the criminal justice system, child protective services, and fear of the loss of their partners;
- (2) Organizational-level influences, specifically the influence of the individual facilitators and their ability to balance support and confrontation;
- (3) Group-level processes, which include the participants' provision (like the facilitators) of support and confrontation, sharing and hearing the stories of others, and modeling nonabusive behaviors and attitudes;
- (4) Individual psychological development, such as learning new interpersonal and emotion-management skills, gaining self-awareness, and deciding to change.

Schrock & Padavic (2007) used extensive nonparticipant observation to explore how masculinity is constructed and negotiated in a Duluth-based batterer intervention program. They found that the (all male) group participants only rhetorically and superficially took responsibility for their behavior while showing no indication that their attitudes or beliefs about women and relationships had changed as intended by the program. Group facilitators challenged the participants on their use of sexist language, such as referring to their partners using possessives (i.e. "my lady"), but, in many other

ways, they simply reinforced the participants' traditional ideas about gender roles. Facilitators used tactics, such as shaming or cajoling, to get their points across while the participants resisted through disengagement or diversion.

### ***Theories Useful to Analysis and Interpretation***

This section provides an overview of the sociological and social psychological theories which have been helpful in my analysis of the DV group intervention, its staff, and its participants. Impression Management/Presentation of Self and Emotion Management help explain the behavior of the group participants and staff members as they interact in the group. Narrative theories also provide a framework which illuminate elements of the process and products of the group intervention. Finally, the stages of change model (also known as the transtheoretical model of change) provides an alternative perspective on intervention with batterers and suggests ways in which the group intervention might be enhanced.

### **Impression Management and Emotion Work**

Erving Goffman's classic, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), describes social action and interaction using the metaphor of the stage and performance. Goffman's dramaturgical perspective posits that in social interaction, individuals are like actors carrying out performances based on a definition of the situation or understanding of the meaning of a particular event or circumstance and the values and norms deemed socially appropriate to that situation. Performances are any and all activities which serve to influence other social participants, and particular performances are carried out based on the social roles that actors occupy. These performances, or presentations of self, include verbal and nonverbal displays by the actor which are intended to create coherency within the social situation, and which often will include activities meant to present the actor in a positive light for his or her audience (that is, other participants in the social activity). Performances seen by the audience occur *front stage* according to Goffman, while the actor is able to drop his or her role *back stage* where there is no audience.



An extension of Goffman's work is the study of impression management (IM) which breaks down and examines the ways in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of others. Though the term impression management has been co-opted to some degree by business and public relations professionals who attempt to use the "arts" of manipulation and persuasion for career success, scholars who study IM focus not just on deceit and misdirection in social interaction, but also on the unintentional, habitual behaviors which all people use to influence others. Central to IM is the self-concept (an individual's understanding of him- or herself) which is thought to develop through social interaction. According to Schlenker (1980), through socialization, people learn the norms and values of others and apply them to make judgments about themselves and determine which social roles they should play. When these rules of interaction become internalized over time, the roles we play become a part of our self-concept, providing us with role-related scripts and expectations for behavior. Roles become part of how we present ourselves in social interaction which then contribute to the development of a social identity, "the way a person is defined and regarded in social interaction" (Schlenker, 1980). How we come across in social interactions lead to certain outcomes, such as self-esteem maintenance, identity coherence, and social and material rewards or consequences (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This is where IM comes into play. Leary & Kowalski (1990) write, "Because the impressions people make on others have implications for how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them, as well as for their own views of themselves, people sometimes behave in ways that will create certain impressions in others' eyes" (p. 34). Examining social behaviors and the motivations behind them in light of this perspective demonstrates the active and mutual influence that social actors have on one another.

Arlie Russel Hochschild's describes emotion management (or emotion work) as the individual's attempt to induce or suppress feelings so as to make them "fit" with a certain definition of the situation, particularly when there is a perceived discrepancy between what one feels and what one wants to feel (1979). Emotion management refers to the acts working to change one's own feelings or another person's feelings as well as having one's feelings "worked upon" by others. Hochschild takes Goffman's presentation of self (1959) as a starting point but, whereas Goffman focuses singularly on

the individual's outward presentation of emotion, Hochschild discusses how emotions are managed inwardly as well. She differentiates surface acting (acting "as if" one feels a certain way) from deep acting (actually trying to feel a particular emotion). Emotion management is enacted according to feeling rules which are the social guidelines that direct individuals in how they should feel in accordance with the situation. For example, feeling rules tell us that we should feel sad at a funeral and behave in ways which demonstrate our sadness, such as crying or appearing somber. Likewise, these rules tell us that we should not be feeling joyful in such a situation and guide us away from behaviors like laughing or telling jokes. Emotion management at a funeral might include an individual trying to focus on the sadness of the event in an effort to suppress feelings of boredom or giddiness or giving a disapproving look to another funeral attendee whose affect is not one of sadness, and therefore, not appropriate to the situation. These concepts are helpful in interpreting the activities that take place in the DV group.

### **Narrative Theory**

Narrative theories in the social sciences examine the role of stories and storytelling in our lives and posit that people are fundamentally storytellers. How we think, communicate, make meaning of the events in our lives, and create our own identities are all connected to how we tell and understand the narratives of life. Narrative theory tells us that as storytellers we actively create the narratives of our lives, rather than simply report past events. The stories we tell are bound and situated in the social, cultural, and political contexts of our lives which set the parameters of acceptable and meaningful narratives (Gubrium & Holsten, 1998). Paul Ricoeur theorized that people make sense of their own and others' biographies just as they would understand any other type of story—by following a plot that links together events. Life's individual events would be meaningless, Ricoeur asserts, without a narrative to make sense of them. People use narratives as a means of understanding the causes and consequences of life events (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005).

From the narrative perspective, the formation of identity focuses not on any inherent or essential qualities of the individual but on the narrative processes through which the individual constructs an identity within social and cultural parameters

(Herman, Jahn & Ryan, 2005). In other words, people tell stories as a means of tying together various aspects of themselves to create the unified whole that is identity. In contrast to linear, logical reasoning (sometimes referred to as paradigmatic thought), narrative thinking allows us to account for inconsistencies and disparate information by “filling in the blanks” with explanations and justifications. We are then able to maintain a particular identity in spite of conflicting information. Baumeister & Newman (1994) state that people are, in fact, particularly likely to create narratives “when confronted with a confusing and contradictory array of social information” (p. 678).

### **Stages of Change**

The transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) posits that individuals progress through specific stages and engage in certain processes when working toward changing problem behaviors. Initially focused on change in psychotherapy and addictive behaviors, the model has since been expanded to apply to other categories of problem behaviors including cigarette smoking, obesity, and exercise acquisition, to name just a few (DiClemente & Prochaska in Norcross & Goldfried, 2003). In recent years, several articles have discussed the contributions the transtheoretical approach could make to interventions with batterers (Daniels & Murphy, 1997; Begun, Shelley, Strodthoff, & Scott, 2001; Eckhardt, Babcock & Homack, 2004).

The transtheoretical approach explicates ten separate processes of change that individuals use to modify problem behaviors and five stages of change through which they move in achieving change. Each stage of change represents a period of time and a set of tasks that must be accomplished in order for the individual to progress to the next stage. Research has found that specific processes of change are associated with specific stages of change, meaning that there are particular tasks that an individual can be helped to accomplish while in a certain stage in the process. Table 1 describes each stage of change and the processes associated with each.

**Table 1. Stages and Processes of Change According to the Transtheoretical Approach**

Stage of Change	Associated Processes of Change
<p><b>Precontemplation</b></p> <p>The individual is not considering change</p>	<p><b>Consciousness raising:</b> Becoming more aware of the causes and negative consequences of problem behavior</p> <p><b>Dramatic relief:</b> Experiencing and expressing feelings about the problem and possible solutions</p> <p><b>Environmental reevaluation:</b> Assessing how the problem affects their environment, including significant others</p>
<p><b>Contemplation</b></p> <p>The individual is seriously considering change</p>	<p><b>Self-reevaluation:</b> Assessing feelings and thoughts about oneself with respect to the problem; Determining which of one's values to act upon and which values to let go</p>
<p><b>Preparation</b></p> <p>The individual makes a commitment to change and prepares to take action</p>	<p><b>Self-liberation:</b> Believing in one's ability to make change and encouraging oneself to do so</p>

Stage of Change	Associated Processes of Change
<p><b>Action</b></p> <p>The individual actively modifies behavior</p>	<p><b>Contingency management:</b> Reinforcing desired behaviors</p> <p><b>Helping relationship:</b> Having a relationship with a helpful and supportive other</p> <p><b>Counterconditioning:</b> Training to extinguish problem reactions and behaviors</p> <p><b>Stimulus control:</b> Learning to control behavioral responses brought on by particular environmental stimuli; Avoiding or minimizing the effects of difficult-to-avoid stimuli</p>
<p><b>Maintenance</b></p> <p>The individual maintains the behavior change</p>	

By assessing a client's stage of change when treating him or her for a problem behavior, a clinician can be guided by this model to choose interventions that are most appropriate for an individual's stage. For example, when a client is in the precontemplation and contemplation stages, s/he is likely to deny having a problem and resist change. It is in these early stages when a client is most likely to drop out of treatment due to low motivation and high resistance. The goal then is to gently build motivation to change. The clinician would use motivational techniques such as expressing empathy, providing choices of ways one might change, and discussing the less desirable aspects of the problem behavior. Direct challenges or confrontations to the client's rationalizations and defenses are only likely to increase resistance (Daniels & Murphy, 1997). As the client moves through each stage, a different type of guidance and

support from the clinician is in order. What guides the approach is the overall commitment to meeting the client where s/he is at the moment.

Since motivating batterers to change their abusive behavior has been consistently identified as a barrier to the success of BIPs, it has been suggested that this approach can provide a way to remove those barriers by meeting clients “where they are” and providing specific types of interventions to move them toward readiness to change. The transtheoretical model and its relevance to batterer intervention programs will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Social science research is dominated by two distinct epistemological paradigms: the positivist and the interpretive (sometimes called the relativist paradigm). Neuman and Krueger (2003) boil these paradigms down to their essences in these definitions:

The positivist view of social science is an “organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity” (p.73).

Interpretive social science is “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (p.81).

Positivists believe that the job of the researcher is to obtain information about a social and physical world that is real and exists “out there” in a way that can be captured, quantified, and examined. It is this view that typically comes to mind when we think of “science”. This is the domain of quantitative research in which objective data is obtained and analyzed so as to uncover patterns and laws about the social and natural world. Contrast this approach with the interpretive view of science in which no objective reality is thought to exist; interpretivists believe that “reality” is subjective and can be understood as a perspective unique to individuals. The goal of research is not to discover the universal laws that govern human behavior, but to ascertain the meanings that people ascribe to themselves, their experiences, and the world around them. Interpretive social science data is qualitative and is in the form of texts generated by social actors. The researcher’s task is to “get inside” the texts and try to understand them from the inside.

Debates about which paradigm is most appropriate for social science research has gone on for decades with positivists arguing that qualitative methods lack rigor, validity, and generalizability while the interpretivists maintain that the quantitative methods reduce human experience to numbers without capturing the subject’s perspective. One point of middle ground in this discussion has been the pragmatic suggestion that the method chosen should be the one that can best answer the particular research question

being asked. Mixed method research with designs containing elements of both qualitative and quantitative methodology have become a kind of “third way”, in that these studies can bring multiple perspectives, both objective and subjective, to bear upon the question.

Greene, Caracelli & Graham (1989) support the use of mixed methods when carried out in the context of an appropriate conceptual framework. From a study of 57 mixed method evaluations, they developed a conceptual framework of five purposes for such studies. They are:

- Triangulation, which seeks convergence, corroborations, correspondence of results from qualitative and quantitative methods;
- Complementary, which seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method;
- Development, which seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method;
- Initiation, which seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of frameworks, the recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other method; and
- Expansion, which seeks to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components. (p.259)

The purpose of this mixed methods study of the Suffolk County Probation Department’s Domestic Violence Unit is consistent with Greene, Caracelli and Graham’s purpose of expansion described above. The research questions I have set forth seek an in-depth description of the unit and its probationers and I believe that representing a multiplicity of perspectives is the most comprehensive method of compiling such a description. More specifically, I sought descriptive quantitative data from probationer case files so as to present the institutional perspective of the county along with qualitative interview data to help me gain insight into the worldviews of the probationers. Group observation allowed me to become the data collection instrument as I took in the setting and events of the intervention and tried to understand them from the inside with both the probationers’ and staff members’ perspectives in mind. My attempt to represent the



multiple views that occupy the DV Unit will, I hope, make a contribution that will be relevant to all those who have participated and assisted in this study.

In addition to representing multiple perspectives, the mixed methods approach used in this study enabled me to examine both outcome and process of the DV Unit's interventions. The quantitative data extracted from probationer case files tell us what has happened to the probationers two years post-sentencing, using variables commonly used in criminal justice research and policy making. Quantitative data of this kind provides a snapshot look at outcomes in a way that qualitative data cannot. The qualitative data that were collected for this study enabled me to describe process *in situ* as I observed and interpreted it. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the strengths of qualitative data as follows:

- Data are naturally occurring; ordinary events can be observed in natural settings.
- Data are locally grounded; they are collected in close proximity to the specific situation; context is preserved, not stripped away.
- Richness and holism of the data are represented; “thick descriptions” provide the strong potential for revealing complexity.
- Data are collected over a sustained period, making them better able to capture process.
- Data collection has flexibility; methods and times can be varied as the research proceeds.
- The focus on lived experience helps locate the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives.
- Those meanings are connected to the social world.

### ***Quantitative***

This study's quantitative data were obtained from the official probation department records of 77 DV Unit probationers. The data provide demographic, psychosocial, and criminal history descriptions of the DV unit probationers as well as information on their program completion and recidivism.

## **Sample**

The sample used for the probation records portion of this study was comprised of 77 probationers who were sentenced to DV Unit supervision and participation in the batterers' intervention group and who attended at least one group session during 2004 or 2005. This particular time frame was chosen for two reasons: (1) to allow that at least some of the probationers in the sample would be attending group contemporaneously with the qualitative data collection (see below) for purposes of methodological triangulation and (2) to enable the examination of outcomes roughly two years subsequent to each probationer's sentence.

Senior Probation Officer June Kenny provided a list of probationers who had been referred for DV Unit intake in 2004 and 2005. This list was supplemented with a list of probationers that was drawn from the Probation Department's computerized data system. The total size of the sampling frame from the two lists was 192. Only probationers who completed at least one group session in 2004 or 2005 were included in the sample. Of the 192 probationers listed in these two sources, data from 77 was found to be usable. Twenty-nine (29) probationers were excluded from the study because they were never actually assigned to the DV Unit caseload and were erroneously included in the computer-generated list. Twenty-five (25) of the probationers listed were referred to the DV Unit during the study period, but did not actually participate in the batterers group during the study period and were, therefore, excluded. Fifteen (15) cases were excluded because they were not referred to the unit or sentenced to probation in 2004 or 2005. The probation files of 25 probationers did not contain PSI documents and three (3) had PSIs that were too incomplete to be included. Thirteen (13) cases were excluded because we were unable to obtain enough data for analysis and six (5) cases were excluded for reasons that were not recorded. A summary of this information is contained in table 2.

**Table 2. Frequencies of cases excluded from sample**

<b>Reason for Exclusion</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
Not on DV Unit caseload	29
Never attended group	25
No PSI/Incomplete PSI	28
Did not attend in 2004 or 2005	15
Missing data	13
Other	6
Total excluded cases	115

### ***Variables***

Data was extracted from the Presentence Investigation (PSI) forms of the selected probationers. Judges may order offenders who have pled guilty to or been convicted of a crime and who may receive probation sentences to undergo presentence investigations. The presentence investigator meets with the offender and asks a series of questions, the answers to which serve to help inform the sentencing judge about the offender's life circumstances and history. Most of the information is self-reported by the probationer; however, probation officers do seek external verification for some of the information, such as current employment and residence.

### **Data Collection**

Under the supervision of Supervising PO June Kenny, probationers' files were accessed either on paper (for open cases) or electronically (for closed cases) and myself and trained research assistants extracted data from the files. As discussed above, the primary source of data within the probationers' files was the PSI form. We also made use of the contact notes taken by POs to document each completed and attempted contact with the probationer, such as attendance at group, home visits, or office reports. The contact notes helped us to determine which of the probationers from our sampling frame had attended at least one group session during the specified time period of this study.

## *Qualitative*

The qualitative data in this study was obtained through nonparticipant observation in three of the probation batterers groups, interaction with staff members during supervision and informally at the probation department offices, and through interviews with probationers and DV unit probation officers and counselors. Data collection took place over the course of one year.

### **Group Observation**

I contacted the Probation DV Unit supervisor Senior Probation Officer June Kenny to discuss how and when to begin the qualitative data collection phase of the study. For convenience sake, I decided to conduct the observation and interviews at a single site, the Hauppauge, NY probation offices. Officer Kenny provided me with a schedule of groups at this location and I chose two that were at times that fit my own schedule. To facilitate my entrée into the batterers groups, Officer Kenny spoke with several of the probation officers to inform them about my study and my wish to observe the groups for a period of several weeks. In January 2007, I attended one of the monthly meetings at which DV Unit officers and group counselors participate in group supervision with Officer Kenny and the director of the clinical aspects of the program Dr. Matthew Campbell. At this meeting, I addressed the group and explained the purpose of my study, how I would be carrying out this portion of the data collection, how confidentiality of data would be maintained, and the ways in which I might need their assistance. I distributed copies of the probationer observation consent form and solicited and answered staff members' questions. I expressed my appreciation for their time and input and encouraged them to contact me with any questions or concerns. This meeting laid the groundwork for my entrance into the group setting.

Beginning in mid January 2007, I began observing two weekly batterers' groups. These groups were sometimes called the clinical groups and they were comprised of probationers who had already completed an initial period of orientation. In March 2007, I expanded my observation to include a Probation Orientation Group (POG) so that I

could learn about the experience of orientation in the DV Unit. In all, I completed approximately 30 hours of observation in the group setting.

My entry into each of the groups was facilitated by the probation officer and/or counselor who ran the group. I was introduced at the beginning of the session and was then given the opportunity to explain the study to the group members. I told the probationers that participation in the study was completely voluntary. I explained that, although I would remain present and observe the group without the participation of each group member, I would not use any of the data obtained through observation of any group member who chose not to consent to participate. To protect their privacy and to avoid the perception of coercion, after reading the consent form aloud I instructed all of the group members to print their names on the last page of the form. Those who wanted to participate in the study could sign the consent form as well. Those who did not want to participate would indicate this by printing their name on the form but not signing it. One probationer who initially chose not to participate, later decided that he would consent to have my observations of his words and actions in the group included among the data.

Throughout the group sessions, I took notes on what I learned and observed. I sometimes took notes on things that were said or done by non-consenting probationers in order to provide context for other observations, however the words and actions of those non-consenting probationers are not included as data in this study.

After each group session, I expanded on the cursory notes made during group and spoke them into an audio recorder. I later transcribed these recordings for analysis.

### **Probationer Interviews**

After approximately eight weeks spent observing the batterers' groups, I began inviting probationers in the groups to participate in interviews. I explained to each group the purpose of the interviews, that the things that they shared would be kept confidential, and that interviews were completely voluntary. I first approached probationers whom I had come to know through group observation and whom I believed were likely to agree to be interviewed. Most of the probationers I initially invited agreed to participate; a few declined. Twelve (12) of the interviewees were white, four (4) were black, one (1) was

Hispanic, and one (1) was Middle Eastern. Interviewees ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s,

Interviews were held in interview rooms nearby the room in which groups were held. These rooms were chosen because they provided enough privacy to encourage the probationers to speak openly but were also near enough to areas where probation officers were working so that I would feel safe in a room alone with the probationers. The doors to the rooms were always closed but they all had glass windows so that others could see inside. With the exception of one probationer, all interviewees agreed to have their interview audio recorded.

The first several probationers to participate were interviewed either before or after attending group. This meant that they were giving “their own time” (as opposed to time designated for probation activities) to be interviewed. The first several interviewees did not object to giving up their time for this purpose; however, it became increasingly difficult to recruit probationers who were willing or able to be at the probation offices early or stay late without disruption to their work schedules or transportation arrangements. One of the probation officers suggested that a few of the probationers in her group, those whom she felt had been compliant with probation and had made progress in group, could use group time to participate in interviews. This eliminated the practical barriers for some probationers. However, others who could not be excused from group, needed greater incentive to participate. After discussion with Officer Kenny and probation department administrators, I decided to offer payment of \$25 to each probationer who participated in an interview. I received IRB approval for this change under the conditions that (1) probationers who had already participated in interviews but were not paid, would be paid and (2) probationers who decided to discontinue the interview before it was completed would still be paid.

The monetary incentive was helpful in increasing recruitment. In some instances, probationers who had not consented to observation agreed to be interviewed. Some probationers whom I invited to be interviewed still refused.

## **Staff Interviews**

I conducted six interviews with Probation Department and VIBS staff members. I invited each of these individuals to be interviewed because I felt that their perspectives would be particularly helpful in elucidating the institutional and clinical aspects of the batterer's group intervention. All of the staff members invited agreed to be interviewed.

Four of the five interviews were conducted in semi-private offices at the probation department at times when few others were nearby. Each of the staff interviewees were consented according to IRB requirements and were assured of the confidentiality of the information and views that they shared. Four of the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees. One interviewee declined to have his/her interview recorded but allowed me to take extensive notes. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and by a paid professional transcription service.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

Analysis was guided by Strauss & Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis. In grounded theory, researchers do not begin with theory to be validated against the empirical evidence but, rather, theory is "derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). In approaching the data without preconceived notions of what will be found, the researcher is required to be simultaneously systematic and creative in understanding and interpreting the "reality" of the data.

Transcripts of all interviews and field notes were read multiple times at the first phases of the analysis. Memos taken during data collection—observations, questions, and notes on process and potential sources of bias—provided the first *sensitizing concepts* for analysis. Blumer (1954) describes sensitizing concepts by comparing them with definitive concepts: "Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look" (p. 7). From these early ideas, codes emerged. Raw data was analyzed and coded using MAXQDA 2007 qualitative analysis software. While many of the initial codes were discarded, several were expanded and became the basis of the theory presented in later chapters.

## **CHAPTER 4 A Description of the Suffolk County Probation Department's Domestic Violence Unit**

The Suffolk County Department of Probation provided supervision to 18,709 individuals in 2007. Some of the county's probationers receive supervision in units created to meet the needs of a specific population with particular issues that set them apart from the general population of probationers. The probation officers who work in these units receive specialized training to help equip them for the unique supervision needs of the population with which they work. The Suffolk County Probation Domestic Violence Program is one of the county's specialized probation units. In partnership with the Victim's Information Bureau of Suffolk (VIBS) and the Retreat, both community-based domestic violence agencies, the DV Unit provides supervision and intervention services to offenders of crimes related to domestic violence, most typically, assault, menacing, criminal trespass, or criminal contempt for violation of an Order of Protection. Like similar programs throughout the country, the main goals of the DV Unit are (1) to increase victim and community safety through the supervision and education of offenders and, (2) to hold offenders accountable for their criminal behavior. What sets the Suffolk DV Unit apart from other probation programs for DV offenders, however, is the partnership between it, VIBS, and the Retreat, specifically the co-facilitation of batterer groups by probation officers and counselors. Nowhere in the domestic violence literature were other such programs found.

### ***State-level Guidance***

In 1998, the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV), the New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives (DPCA), and the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV) received a grant from the federal Department of Justice to implement the Domestic Violence Probation Intervention Project. The goals of this project were to support the development of local domestic violence policies, procedures, and protocols which would



provide more consistent legal system responses to both victims and offenders, promote collaboration across agencies in the community, and foster relationships with local domestic violence advocates

([www.opdv.state.ny.us/criminaljustice/corrections/probation](http://www.opdv.state.ny.us/criminaljustice/corrections/probation)). To advance these goals, the state created the Probation Domestic Violence Advisory Workgroup, made up of experienced probation professionals who worked together to develop a model state domestic violence policy, designed training for probation departments and courts, and developed technical assistance materials. The grant under which these initiatives were implemented also enabled the creation of a statewide network of Probation Domestic Violence Liaisons who served as the local departmental contacts who could provide expertise and guidance internally as departments developed domestic violence initiatives.

An evaluation of the Probation Domestic Violence Intervention Project (Fernandez Lanier, Chard-Wierschem & Hall, 2003) compiled feedback from probation DV liaisons throughout the state. This study found that the Project positively influenced the work of local probation departments and probation liaisons, that the training developed by the Project was important and useful to local departments—and specifically that two-thirds of the liaisons who responded to the survey reported that training had improved the manner in which they responded to the safety needs of victims, and that one-third of the respondent liaisons “felt more informed, conscientious and willing to utilize the expertise of advocates” (p.1). In 1999, Supervising Probation Officer June Kenny joined the Probation Domestic Violence Advisory Workgroup. Senior Probation Officer Terri Dorhenwend followed in 2003.

### ***DV Unit History***

A program called Helping Abusers Learn Together (HALT) was developed by clinical psychologist Dr. Matthew Campbell and members of the VIBS staff in 1986. At that time, there were no other batterer intervention services available in Suffolk County. Early groups were comprised entirely of members who attended voluntarily, as there was not yet a formal arrangement with the probation department or any other criminal justice entity through which batterers would be mandated to attend. During the late 1980s, collaboration developed between HALT and the probation department and Dr. Campbell

offered training to a few probation officers in how to work with batterers according to the HALT program principles. At this time, the Suffolk County Probation Department had only one probation officer with a dedicated caseload of domestic violence offenders. This officer, who was also a social worker, and Dr. Campbell eventually partnered to co-lead HALT groups and this informal collaboration lasted for several years.

In 1996, Supervising Probation Officer June Kenny, formerly clinical director of the Adult Special Offender Unit (also known as the sex offender unit) at the probation department, became a supervisor of the two POs in the new DV Unit designated just to handling domestic violence cases. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Campbell and Officer Kenny developed a more formal collaboration between HALT and the probation department in which HALT-trained counselors would co-facilitate groups of probationers only with DV Unit probation officers. These groups are now the centerpiece of Suffolk County Probation's domestic violence program.

### ***Program Intake***

DV Unit probationers are typically referred to the program from Suffolk County's specialized domestic violence criminal court, the integrated domestic violence court, or the general criminal court. Offenders are referred to batterers' intervention when they commit crimes that involve violence, abuse, or intimidation of an intimate partner or former partner, or the violation of an order of protection held by an intimate partner or former partner. The most common crime leading to a sentence of probation and referral to the DV Unit is criminal contempt for violating orders of protection.

Upon pleading or being found guilty of a charge involving domestic violence, the probationer is typically ordered by the judge to undergo a pre-sentence investigation (PSI). The offender's case is sent to the probation department liaison at the court which then sends the case to the PSI unit. The offender subsequently will be sent in the mail a letter specifying a date on which he must appear for his pre-sentence interview. The PSI investigator interviews the offender to obtain the specifics of his current living situation, job status and history, health, mental health, substance abuse, family composition and support network, and other variables which provide the judge with information helpful in determining appropriate sentence and conditions of probation. (Judges in some cases,

however, will sentence offenders to probation without ordering a PSI.) The PSI officer will also typically contact the DV Unit officer in charge of victim's services. The victim services officer will attempt to contact the victim in the case to offer assistance in preparing a victim impact statement and obtaining any support services she might need to cope with her current situation.

Most probationers who end up in the DV Unit have received sentences of three or five years of probation, although some are serving one year sentences or have agreed to complete the program prior to sentencing in what is called interim probation. Before beginning probation in the DV Unit, probationers' PSIs are screened by the unit's Supervising Probation Officer June Kenny to ensure that they are in fact appropriate for the program. Excluded from the program are offenders with serious, untreated mental illness. The DV Unit strongly encourages the courts to impose conditions of probation that prohibit the use of alcohol or drugs for all DV Unit probationers and will often make the additional recommendation that probationers are mandated to participate in substance abuse treatment. Probationers with serious substance abuse problems may be placed in a Probation Department-approved, VIBS-monitored dual-focus program which can address their needs for both batterer and addiction treatment.

### ***Program Design***

The DV Unit follows a correctional treatment model, a combination of psychoeducational, therapeutic, and enforcement components aimed at teaching offenders to take responsibility for their own behavior and not to blame or control others. Once screened into the program, probationers are required to participate in weekly group sessions for a minimum of one year. Group sessions are co-led by trained probation officers and counselors hired and trained by the HALT program, a division of VIBS. All probationers who enter the group are required to undergo a screening and intake with HALT staff. In group, probation officers and counselors emphasize concepts such as the ways in which abusive men use violence to dominate and control their partners. Like other batterer intervention programs, this program employs cognitive-behavioral techniques, which are therapeutic practices that encourage clients to change their thinking patterns which can then result in emotional and behavioral changes. Separate groups are

available for Spanish-speaking probationers. For probationers with co-occurring domestic violence and substance abuse problems, groups are available at ACCESS/ACCESSO, a substance abuse service of the Town of Islip, NY. Counselors there receive training from HALT to facilitate dual-focus (substance abuse and domestic violence) groups.

In group, probationers are expected to participate in group discussions, demonstrate in things that they say and do that they are taking responsibility for their abusive behavior, and follow group rules and procedures. The rules common to all of the DV Unit groups include:

1. Attend every group session. If a session is missed, the probationer is still required to pay for that session.
2. Have a money order for the exact amount of the session fee. Those without their money orders will not be allowed to participate in group.
3. In discussion, focus only on one's own behavior and do not discuss the victim's behavior in any way that suggests that the victim is responsible for the abuse.
4. No cross-talking or interrupting group members or staff members.
5. Refer to women in respectful ways. Use the word "woman" instead of "girl" when referring to an adult female.
6. Do not wear any clothing with logos or messages that endorse the use of alcohol or other drugs or which represent disrespect for women.
7. Do not stand up without asking permission of the probation officer and/or counselor.
8. Comply with all court-ordered conditions of probation.

The DV Unit program follows a "step-down" approach, meaning that probationers begin receiving a high level of intervention and supervision and gradually work towards less intensive probation supervision. Most offenders begin in one of the Probation Orientation Groups (POG) in which they learn the concepts fundamental to the program as well as group rules, procedures, and expectations. POG sessions last one

hour and are facilitated jointly by probation officers and counselors. By participating in POG with other probationers who are new to the DV Unit, particularly unruly or disruptive probationers can be identified before they have the opportunity to contaminate ongoing treatment groups and disturb the group process. The POs move probationers into POG as shortly after sentencing as possible, which has been shown increase the likelihood that an offender will complete an intervention program (add citation). Probationers are introduced to the program's basic concepts in POG and typically complete approximately twelve weeks before being transferred into ongoing treatment groups.

Once a probationer has attended POG consistently, without any problems such as poor attendance or violations of probation, the group counselors, the probation officer, and the Unit supervisor make the decision that he can move into the clinical group. These group sessions are 90 minutes long and its format is less didactic and more interactive than POG. Probationers are expected to have learned most of the basic ideas around which the intervention is based (taking accountability, refraining from victim-blaming, learning to identify the different types of abuse, etc.) and to follow the same rules and procedures as those in POG. In the clinical group, the probationers are encouraged to examine issues such as control, anger, and violence in their own lives in depth and to accept feedback from both the group facilitators and fellow group members.

Probationers are required to pay a fee per group session (\$30 for POG and usually \$35 for the treatment group, though some pay less on a sliding scale). This is done in part to help defray the costs of VIBS's service provision, but also is a mechanism that is used to hold the offenders accountable for their crimes. Probationers are frequently required to meet with their probation officer before group sessions, at which time the officer may conduct urine or breathalyzer testing to ensure that offenders are adhering to probation conditions. This takes place instead of the regularly-scheduled reporting to the probation department required of probationers on regular caseloads. Probation officers make regular, unscheduled visits to the DV Unit probationers at their homes and/or places of work.

A probationer's completion of the program is determined by the probation officers, counselors, and supervisors. According to the HALT program's Batterers Intervention Program Guide (Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk, 2002), in order to have successfully completed the program the batterer must,

1. Have discontinued physically abusive, threatening, or gross verbally abusive behavior;
2. Be fully accountable for past abusive behavior;
3. Be able to explain what he should have done differently during his most violent incident;
4. Be fully accountable for future choices;
5. Be able to identify his potential warning signs and have a plan for nonabusiveness in place;
6. Be in compliance with orders of protection;
7. Have a plan for enlisting support when needed; and
8. Demonstrate awareness of recidivism risk.

Probationers will typically attend POG for approximately twelve weeks before moving to the clinical group. Whereas POG is more structured and didactic, the clinical group focuses on discussion and interaction among group members. Probationers who participate in group for the required minimum of 52 weeks (including the twelve or so weeks of POG) and are successful in meeting the above criteria then complete the group and move to a lower level supervision. This level of supervision includes biweekly or monthly officer reports (appointments with their PO at the Probation Department), continued periodic unscheduled visits at home and work, and random drug and alcohol testing. With continued success in avoiding abusive and criminal behavior, the probationer will be switched to a new probation officer and step down to less frequent office reports which will continue until the end of the probation term.

Currently, eleven groups meet in four locations throughout the county. Probationers with serious substance abuse problems may be referred to a dual-focus (substance abuse and battering) group co-led by counselors from community substance abuse agencies which have met standards of both the Probation Department and VIBS.

These groups focus on issues related to both substance abuse and domestic abuse. The DV Unit also provides groups for Spanish speaking probationers co-led by a Spanish-speaking probation officer and counselor, with whom the Probation Department contracts for service.

The Unit is comprised of the following probation department staff:

- 1 supervising probation officer,
- 4 Senior POs doing the supervision and groups,
- 1 Senior PO doing Victims' Services work,
- PI (Probation Investigator) assisting in Victims' Services,
- 1 PO, Spanish speaking and
- 1 PO for secondary and tertiary level supervision.

Day-to-day supervision of the probation officers is provided by the unit's supervising probation officer, June Kenny, LCSW. Dr. Matthew Campbell, a clinical psychologist and co-developer of the HALT program, provides training and clinical supervision of both the DV Unit officers and the VIBS counselors. Once a month, the entire staff of the DV Unit comes together for group supervision co-led by Dr. Campbell and Officer Kenny. In group supervision, probation officers and counselors have the opportunity to discuss particular cases with their supervisors and co-workers. Dr. Campbell and Officer Kenny also present new issues for discussion based on new research or policy in the field of batterer intervention. Outside of supervision, POs and counselors who co-facilitate groups communicate before and after group sessions and occasionally consult by telephone between sessions when needed. Both probation and VIBS staff report that the supervision, training, and ongoing consultation that are built into the program enable them to provide a consistent and unitary intervention to probationers.

### ***Victims' Services***

In addition to the services provided to probationers, the DV Unit has one Senior Probation Officer dedicated to meeting the needs of the probationers' victims and a Probation Investigator (PI) who assists the Senior PO. The victims' services Senior PO

provides the victim with safety planning, advocacy, referrals, preparation of victim impact statements, and ongoing supportive contact while the offender is on probation. The victim's services probation officer also provides initial information, support, and referral to those victims whose offender is assigned to supervision on caseloads other than the DV unit.

In a typical case, the victims' services Senior PO and PI receive notification from the probation department's presentence investigator that a domestic violence offender is under consideration for probation in the DV Unit. The presentence investigator provides the Senior PO with the name and contact information of the offender's victim. The PI or the Senior PO then send the victim a letter inviting her to prepare a victim's impact statement in which she can provide the court with information about the crime itself, her feelings about it, and the effects it has had on her life. The letter also makes the victim aware of the fact that the information that she provides on the victim's impact statement may be made available to the offender's attorney and the offender himself. The victim is also extended the opportunity to meet with the Senior PO for assistance with preparing the victim's impact statement and/or to obtain any information, support, or referrals for services. The prepared victim's impact statements are sent to the sentencing judge for review prior to the offender's sentencing. Once an offender has been sentenced to probation under the supervision of the DV unit, another letter is mailed to the victim informing her of the offender's sentence and the probation department's obligation to notify her of any threats the offender may make against her or any suspicion that she might be in danger. This letter includes the following information as well:

“As a part of our commitment towards the victims of domestic violence, I have been assigned to act as a liaison between you and the criminal justice system. I am available to discuss questions, concerns, or information regarding this individual. Any contact will be kept confidential, unless you would like the information to be shared with the Probation Officer assigned the case. Additionally, I can discuss safety planning, provide referrals for support services and counseling, and provide information regarding Orders of Protection.”

Women who choose to may maintain ongoing contact with victims' services so that the Senior PO may serve as a liaison between the victim and the probationer's PO. The victim may inform the Senior PO about any abusive behavior or violations of



probation on the part of the probationer, which can then be confidentially passed on to the probationer's PO to aid in supervision. The Senior PO can continue to provide support, information, and referrals to the victim throughout the probationer's sentence.

Over the last three years, victims' services has received an average of 152 new referrals per year. The response rate from victims who are contacted by the Senior PO and PI is approximately 65%, though not all of those women complete victim's impact statements. Since the creation of the Senior PO's position, the victims services staff have provided services to over 500 victims of abuse.

The benefits of providing services to victims of DV unit probationers are many. Victims of domestic violence crimes differ in significant ways from victims of other crimes in that they are likely to have ongoing interaction with the offender. In sex offense cases, relationships between victims (and their family members) and perpetrators are typically severed following the discovery and subsequent prosecution of the crime. When an individual is the victim of a DWI or other alcohol-related offense, the perpetrator is likely to be a stranger, a person with whom the victim will have no further contact. Domestic violence victims may choose not to end their relationships with the offenders for a variety of reasons: they may fear that ending the relationship will increase the danger they are in, they may not feel they can survive financially without the relationship, or they may continue to have feelings for their abuser and want to continue the partnership, to name just a few of the myriad reasons. Some victims may have to maintain contact because they are required to co-parent with offenders who have visitation or joint custody of their children. The Senior PO and PI who have contact with the victims are trained to respond sensitively to the issues that victims confront, such as the emotional and psychological effects of abuse, the complications of co-parenting and/or ongoing intimate relationships with the offender, and the risks of sharing information that could be used against her by the offender if care is not taken. Having dedicated probation professionals serve the needs of victims promotes victim safety and well-being by helping the victims connect with needed safety planning, counseling, advocacy and other services to which they might not easily access without support. In having the ability to safely share information with a probation department professional,

the victim is given a voice in the system which holds the offender accountable for his abuse; this can be empowering and reassuring for victims.

Further, in having access to the information that the victim provides about the probationer's behavior at home and in the community, the probation department is able to more safely and effectively supervise that probationer. For example, a woman whose husband violates his probation conditions by drinking can report that information to the Senior PO who then passes the information on to the probationer's PO. The probationer's PO can use this information, without making the probationer aware of its source, by making an additional unannounced home contact and consequently request a urine sample.

Finally, providing services to victims in the probation context sends the message to offenders, the rest of the criminal justice system, and the community at large that the needs of victims are important and taken seriously by the Department of Probation.

## ***Group Intervention***

### **Overview**

As discussed earlier, batterer intervention groups have become the criminal justice system's primary approach to dealing with domestic violence perpetrators. In the absence of empirically-supported best practices or standards, BIPs throughout the country vary in their goals, implementation, and outcomes. Whereas the typical model of for BIPs have group interventions taking place in community agencies, the Suffolk County Probation DV Unit's approach in providing a psycho-educational/cognitive behavioral intervention under the auspices of the Probation Department makes it a unique program.

The term psychoeducation was originally coined to refer to education provided to patients with mental disorders about their conditions, its effects, and how to manage it. Now more widely applied, psychoeducation commonly refers the practice of providing information and skills to help individuals cope with problems or difficulties they experience. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is based on the premise that thoughts, not external events, are what cause our feelings and behavior. CBT is a collaborative process between the therapist and the client of identifying and restructuring the clients'

thoughts so as to alleviate painful feelings and reduce problematic behavior. CBT is considered one of the few “talk therapies” that has strong empirical support for its effectiveness (Lamber, Bergin & Garfield, 2004). The DV unit’s group intervention does not constitute cognitive behavioral *therapy*, but it does make use of cognitive behavioral techniques such as challenging irrational thinking, communication training, and self monitoring. Hamberger (1997) describes the role of CBT techniques in batterers’ intervention as follows,

Cognitive behavioral approaches to batterer treatment place responsibility for the violence on the perpetrator, the client who performs the behaviors and who can control the underlying cognitive processes leading to his performing the behaviors. Specific intervention targets are identified in the cognitive and behavioral patterns of the client, including the violent acts, gender-based assumptions and attitudes that are thought to underlie many men's violence toward women, and deficits in labeling, attribution, and problem-solving skills that may predispose the offender to violence. (p.148)

Dr. Matthew Campbell, a clinical psychologist with many years of experience working with abusive men, is the developer of the HALT program and the clinical supervisor for the DV unit group intervention. He describes the program as grounded in a sociopolitical model of domestic violence which recognizes that male to female aggression is a byproduct of gender inequality in society. In this respect, the program is similar to the Duluth Model. Along with this focus on societal factors is a parallel focus on the individual—both individual accountability and the circumstances of the individual’s life. Dr. Campbell believes that the program’s attention to societal and individual factors fits well with a coordinated community response to domestic violence that includes criminal justice and other community services.

This model of intervention has two primary components:

1. Engage-confront- the counselors and PO’s must first engage the client and build some level of rapport and trust, and then confront the client about his abusive behavior, and
2. Sanctions and services- batterers must be held accountable for their acts in the criminal justice system with appropriate sanctions and they also must be provided with the additional services, such as substance abuse and mental health treatment, that they need.

## **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative analysis of the observation data I collected has revealed a number of themes, some of which are reflected in the literature on the topic and some of which appear to be unique to Suffolk Probation's collaborative approach. My first group observations were conducted in two different clinical groups. After several weeks, I realized that without observing in POG, I was only able to acquire part of the story of what was happening in the group interventions. I soon obtained permission from Supervising PO June Kenny and began observing a POG group once a week. In this section, using my observation field notes and some interview data, I describe my understanding of what goes on in the DV unit groups.

## **Group Setting**

The groups in which I observed were all held on weekday evenings at the Suffolk County Probation Department offices in Hauppauge, NY. I usually entered through the back staff entrance, rather than park where the probationers park and walk through the waiting room. It was suggested to me by a counselor that it would probably be safer if the probationers didn't see me getting into and leaving in my car. I preferred entering from the back, as I found it uncomfortable to walk through the sometimes crowded waiting room filled primarily with men. The room in which the groups took place seemed to me to be typical of the kind of county government buildings in which social service and criminal justice activities take place. The room was well-lit with fluorescent lights and has a blue carpet with a dark stain by the doorway. About twelve chairs were arranged in a circle around the room. At the front of the room, where either the counselor or the probation officer usually sits, is a blackboard with writing on it. There is a television and VCR on a black cart and a desk in front of the blackboard. The door to room doesn't close completely and is often propped closed with the trash can after the session begins. At the beginning of a session the can is often placed in the center of the room, ready to contain the breathalyzer tubes which will be used by the probationers and then discarded. The room, like the rest of the building, is clean but dingy.

Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of performance to describe how individuals present themselves to others in the course of everyday interaction. Specifically, performance is any activity carried out by participants of social interaction which “serve to influence in any way any of the other participants” (p. 15). The setting of the DV group—the appearance of the building, the arrangement of chairs in the room, and even the trash can—sets the stage for the performances that takes place there. The dinginess of the building and the stain on the carpet, though not intentionally created to give a specific impression, nevertheless differentiate this setting for the probationers (and for an observer like myself) from one in which other services are provided, such as a doctor’s office. The probation building is not meant to be aesthetically pleasing or to induce a feeling of well-being; it is a place where individuals go when they have done something wrong and are being punished. Neither the building itself nor the room in which group takes place are in any way welcoming or warm.

The way the chairs are arranged in a circle is likely to give the probationers an immediate impression upon entering the room of what will be expected of them. Specifically, they must face one another and the group facilitators directly. One cannot hide in a circle. Individuals who typically look for a seat in the back of the room when entering an unfamiliar setting are unable to do so in the group. In some settings, like a support group or social gathering, chairs arranged in a circle would signal warmth and intimacy, a suggestion of safety in being surrounded by others. At the probation building, however, with its harsh lighting and institutional feel, no such warmth would be expected. Rather, the setting is likely to trigger a sense of vulnerability in probationers new to the group, indicating that they will have to face their peers and make themselves open to whatever it is that happens here.

### **Probation Orientation Group (POG)**

After meeting individually with their POs, probationers who are new to the DV unit are told to report to POG at the site geographically nearest to their homes, either in Yaphank or Hauppauge. It is in POG where they will be taught about the different types of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and financial), the power and control motivation for men’s abuse of women, the effects of sexist attitudes, the role of substance

abuse in domestic violence, and other issues that comprise the core principles of the DV group intervention. For some probationers, their domestic violence offense is their first interaction with the criminal justice system; they are unused to being among and being treated as criminals. Others come to the DV Unit with lengthy criminal histories which may include violent, property, and substance abuse related offenses, as the quantitative data in this study indicates. DV Unit probationers include middle class professionals and manual laborers, men ranging from 18 years old to over 60 years old, primarily African Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos, men with wives of many years and men who were involved with their victims for short periods of time. With all the ways in which they differ from one another, they have one thing in common: none of them wants to be there.

The POG sessions that I attended were co-facilitated by a female PO and a female counselor. What follows is a composite description of a typical POG session according to my observations, with details taken from the 17 sessions I attended. This composite contains some of the most significant and frequently observed elements of POG, which will be discussed in more detail below.

#### Typical Probation Orientation Group (POG) Session:

I enter the room and greet Maria, the PO and Sue, the counselor. They are going over some paperwork. When they finish, they chat about a particular probationer whose last check to VIBS bounced. He had come up with a ridiculous sounding excuse as to why the check bounced and was saying that they agency was incompetent in its handling of it. We all talked and laughed about it for a minute before Maria left to bring the guys in from the waiting room.

The probationers entered quietly a minute later. They seemed tense and almost solemn. No one was smiling or talking to anyone else. Several of them approached Sue to hand in their money orders. One probationer, Jack, tried to give her cash and Sue explained clearly and firmly that they had to bring money orders for the exact amount to every session. Nothing else would be accepted. Jack sighed exasperatedly and turned his back to Sue while saying that he would have it next week. Maria was looking at her own records and asked another probationer, Connor, if he had done his intake at VIBS yet. He responded that he didn't know what she was talking about. Then Maria got the group's attention and said, "Everyone in here should know that you have to complete an intake at VIBS before you can move on to the next group." There was a lot of grumbling then and a probationer, Jose, who was sitting next to me said, "I'm glad she said that or I would have been in here for a year without knowing I had to go to VIBS."

Maria passed out breathalyzer tubes wrapped in clear plastic. The probationers ripped off the plastic and waited for their turn to be tested. Maria quickly tested each probationer one at a time. None of the probationers tested positive for alcohol. When all of the business was taken care of, Sue got the group's attention and said that since there were new probationers in the group tonight, everyone should introduce himself and explain why he is here. She nodded to Jack who was sitting next to her. Jack said, "I'm Jack. I'm here because my wife got an order of protection against me and I broke it by calling her." Sue responds by saying, "Jack, remember that we're really interested in what you did, not what your wife did." She then nods to the probationer sitting next to Jack, a guy named Sam who has been in group for several weeks. He introduces himself by saying, "My name is Sam and I'm on probation because I threw a phone at my girlfriend and was verbally abusive to her." Sue and Maria nod approvingly at Sam's introduction. The introductions continue around the room, with the probationers briefly describing what they did, some by detailing their behaviors specifically and others with general statements that avoid their own culpability. Those probationers who are forthright and specific in their introductions are met with Maria's and Sue's approval, while the others are challenged to make a statement that shows more accountability and leaves out references to the victim's behavior. One in particular, a new probationer named Ted, says, "My wife told the cops I hit her." Sue again reminded the group that they are here to talk about their own behavior, not that of their victim. This probationer responds by saying, "But that's what happened". His answer seems to get the group's attention as some of them look around the room awaiting the response of the facilitators. Maria tells Ted that she happens to have his probation case file with her because she thought some clarification might be necessary. She then reads the list of charges from Ted's criminal history record and excerpts from the police and victim statements about the incident that led to his probation sentence. Ted tried to interrupt several times, saying that his wife lied and the police believed her, but Maria sternly told him that it was not his turn to speak. One of the other group members spoke up and said, "How come Ted doesn't get a chance to talk? You're not giving him a chance to tell his side of the story." Maria explained that Ted has had a chance to explain and now he is on probation. In this group, she told them, you are expected to take accountability for the things you have done. Ted folded his arms over his chest and looked down at the floor. He appears angry, as if he is working hard at not speaking.

Then Maria asks for a volunteer to list the group rules. No one responds immediately and Maria looks around the room before saying, "Do I have to call on someone?" Leo looks slightly annoyed and then raises his hand while beginning to list the rules. "Bring your money. Be on time. Don't talk about what your victim did. Don't wear clothing that says anything about drugs or alcohol or that disrespect women." A few other probationers add in the rules that he misses. Most of the group looks bored and some look hostile, presumably because they have had to hear the rules several times already. Once the rules have

been listed, Sue passes around a handout entitled “Myths about domestic violence.” She reads each statement and solicits responses from the group as to whether each is true or false. About four or five guys participate in the discussion while the rest sit quietly. The discussion touches on the role of alcohol in domestic violence, the different types of abuse, and other topics that make up the “basics” of the program. When all of the statements on the handout have been discussed, Sue calls on a few of the probationers individually to ask if they know what their conditions of probation are. This brought up several questions from the group about how long they would have to stay in group, what their different orders of protection meant, and other procedural issues. Maria answered their questions quickly until time ran out. She and Sue end the group and Maria begins to lead them back to the waiting room. One probationer, sounding urgent, asks her questions about his probation conditions as they walk out of the room. Sue makes a few notes in her records and we both leave.

Social actors, Goffman tells us, enact “parts” or “routines” which consist of “pre-established pattern(s) of action” (p. 15). In the group session described above, we find probation staff and probationers playing parts that are consistent with the definition of the situation and their respective statuses within that situation. Probation officers and counselors, in their positions of authority, explicitly establish their expectations of probationers’ behavior in the group and enforce those expectations through what they say and do. Group participants are in subordinate roles to the facilitators and their primary task in the group is to follow directions (i.e. pay the weekly fee, submit to a breathalyzer exam, introduce themselves according to the rules.) There were some signs of resistance to authority and disgruntlement, such as Jack’s exasperated sigh when he was told his payment would not be accepted, and one probationer directly challenged the PO by asking why Ted was not allowed to speak freely. Group facilitators in this situation, and in all others I observed, maintain their authoritative roles by responding quickly and directly to challenges. In the above scenario, when Maria (PO) pointed out to Ted his status as a probationer and said that “in this group you are expected to take accountability for the things you have done,” she was reminding all group members of their roles and of the performances that were expected of them in those roles.

Emotion management is also taking place in the interaction among probationers and facilitators. Facilitators set feeling rules about the expression of emotion by telling the probationers how they must speak and behave in group. When probationers are told



that they are must “take accountability” for their actions, the expectation is set that they will express feelings of guilt, remorse, and desire to change and will suppress emotions like anger and resentment toward others. Facilitators enforce feeling rules verbally by reminding probationers of the feeling rules and nonverbally through body language and gestures, such as when Sue and Maria nod approvingly at Sam’s introduction in the earlier example.

We can also assume that probationers are working at managing their own emotions, as well as having them managed. In their subordinate roles, they may not make significant bids at challenging the authority of the facilitators without expecting negative outcomes such as being asked to leave the group or “getting violated” (being charged with a violation of probation). Instead of yelling or acting out aggressively, behaviors likely related to why they are on probation in the first place, the group members must actively keep their anger in check. Looking once again at Ted in the example above, it seems that he is expressing his anger in a controlled way by crossing his arms over his chest and looking down at the floor, rather than continuing to put up resistance to the PO’s charges against him.

Group Tone: Each POG session I attended was characterized by a sense of tension. While some probationers appeared more relaxed than others, the general tone was one of unease. A few of the probationers were more talkative in response to questions than the rest, but this seemed, based on their body language and tone of voice, to be more a function of conforming to the facilitators’ expectations than of a genuine desire to share their thoughts in group. These men seemed to have learned that if they do not participate, they will not advance to the clinical group, which they were eager to do. The facilitators were firm in enforcing the rules and norms of the group and seemed comfortable in their roles. They occasionally used humor to call attention to a probationer’s sexist remark or an excuse that seemed unlikely or ridiculous.

Since most of the POG members are new to the DV Unit and the group itself, they are likely to feel uneasy entering the group. They enter with the definition of the situation already having been established by the facilitators and the probationers who have preceded them. New probationers play no part in establishing their roles or the rules

of interaction in the group; they enter the scene already having been assigned the part of the probationer and they must play that role as expected or face sanctions (i.e. correction or admonishment in group, embarrassment in front of peers, etc.). The role of the probationer is one of relative powerlessness in this situation. In more, everyday interaction, individuals have greater flexibility in their self-presentation and they may use various tactics of speech or other behavior to try to control others' impressions of them. With the explicit rules set forth in the group, probationers have less opportunity than in other situations to present themselves in particular ways (i.e. tough or macho, the silent type, the rebel against authority, etc.) With their speech so carefully monitored by group facilitators, common verbal strategies of impression management, such as describing oneself in a particular way, may be limited. The imbalance of power between the group facilitators and the probationers and the probationers' likely struggle upon entry into the group to adopt an unfamiliar social role, can explain much of the palpable tension in the POG sessions.

Rules and Procedures: A significant amount of time was spent in POG explaining and reviewing group rules and procedures, conditions of probation, and expectations for advancing to the clinical group. These discussions took up a considerable portion of each group, but because new probationers were entering the group regularly and many continued to have difficulty understanding and/or following the rules, this review seemed a necessary part of the probationers' orientation. Some of the probationers seemed to consistently have difficulty following group rules and procedures about payment. They would bring the incorrect amount or the wrong type of payment (personal check or cash instead of money order), or they would make excuses and describe the hardship of coming up with the money each week. Probationers often grumbled quietly to each other about "new" information, things that were required of them which they claimed not to have known about. The VIBS intake in the description above is a typical example. The PO would occasionally review the probationers' conditions of probation and their orders of protection. Some men did not even know what specific crimes to which they had plead guilty. I later learned in interviews that some of the probationers claim to have

been advised by lawyers to plead guilty and receive a probation sentence without knowing that the weekly group would be a condition of their probation.

Because the rules and procedures seemed to be explained clearly in POG, it is difficult to assess just why probationers had such a difficult time knowing or understanding what was expected of them. For some, claiming not to understand might have been an excuse not to follow up what was required, a way of “playing dumb” and testing the limits of what they could get away with. Others may have cognitive or intellectual limitations that prevent them processing or retaining multiple pieces of information. If this is the case for some probationers, perhaps learning the rules and procedures in the group setting is not sufficient and additional one-on-one officer reports with the PO would be helpful. Regardless of the reason, the repetition of rules and procedures during group is clearly an important (though perhaps not efficient) element of the intervention.

Introductions/Telling the Story: The weekly ritual of introducing oneself and describing briefly what brought them to probation is a significant part of the probationers’ movement toward increased accountability for their crimes. Describing their crimes according to group expectations—that is, with a clear description of the specific behavior for which one was arrested, without reference to the victim’s behavior, and without justifications or excuses—is the probationers’ first major task in group and this activity helps to establishment the definition of the situation. Introductions and storytelling require the probationers to conform to proscribed scripts that they may feel inaccurately describe their situations, specifically their role in an abusive relationship. In describing what they have done, probationers must make themselves vulnerable to the facilitators’ feedback and correction.

Telling one’s own story in any social context involves some amount of impression management (Schlenker, 1980). In the context of the DV group, the stakes for influencing the impressions of others are quite high: group facilitators (and POs in particular) hold significant power over the probationers’ “graduation” from POG to the clinical group, whether or not the probationers are charged with a violation of probation, and how much community surveillance (unannounced home visits, drug testing, etc.) to

which the probationers are subject. The consequences of telling a story that does not comply with group rules are the kinds of social and material outcomes that Leary & Kowalski refer to when they write, “Conveying the right impression increases the likelihood that one will obtain desired outcomes and avoid undesired outcomes” (p. 37). Additionally, probationers are likely to feel pressure to make certain impressions on their peers; perhaps they want to appear tough or resistant to authority or would prefer to call as little attention to themselves as possible for fear of provoking a confrontation with another group member. Probationers must attempt to simultaneously manage the impressions of facilitators who hold power over their future in the criminal justice system and fellow probationers with the potential to threaten or humiliate them in some way. No one in POG wants to give the impression that he is enjoying or does not mind being there, yet to show too much resistance would send a negative impression to the facilitators. Navigating this landscape of self-presentation and producing a narrative about one’s past behaviors that manages the impressions of the probationers’ audience are challenging tasks. Chapter 6 examines in greater depth the role that these stories play in the group intervention.

## **Clinical Group**

Probationers enter the clinical group after completing approximately twelve weeks in POG. In rare cases, as when one new probationer had already attended a non-probation HALT group at VIBS for a significant length of time, one may move to clinical more quickly. Though still structured, the clinical group is far less didactic than POG and a greater focus is on interaction among group members. A composite example of a typical clinical group session follows.

### **Typical Clinical Group Session:**

When I enter the room, John, the counselor and Renee, the PO, are already in the room discussing a probationer who has been absent from group for a few weeks. Renee has the probationer’s case file and she and John are looking through it together. John says that the probationer also owes money for sessions he failed to pay for weeks ago. They discuss whether or not this individual should be allowed to stay for group tonight. Renee says that she is willing to let him stay, provided that he at least has his money for tonight’s session.

John and Renee both greet me when they finish talking. Renee then says that she is going to go out to the waiting room to get the guys and bring them in. John and I chat for a moment and I ask him how he thinks the probationer Joseph is progressing. He says that Joseph is really resistant and he's not sure how he is ever going to complete the group. I agree. Then Renee returns with the guys, seven in all. They greet each other pleasantly and a few say hello to me politely. Some sit down and get settled and others approach John to give him their money orders. Each picks up a breathalyzer tube wrapped in clear plastic from the desk in the front of the room. John and one of the probationers, Jesse, are discussing Jesse's balance. John is looking at his records and telling Jesse that he owes \$60. Jesse appears frustrated and quietly expresses his disagreement with John. John advises him to contact VIBS and speak with them directly about the discrepancy. Jesse agrees but looks somewhat defeated. He takes his seat and shakes his head almost imperceptibly.

While the guys settle their balances with John, the rest unwrap their breath tubes and wait for Renee to test each of them with the breathalyzer. She makes it around to all of them in two or three minutes. None of the guys appears to have blown a positive BAC. I have never been in a group in which someone did test positive for alcohol.

Renee leaves the room and John indicates to the group that he is ready to begin by looking around expectantly. Once everyone quiets down he says, "So, this past weekend was a holiday. How did that go for everyone?" No one responds. John looks around at the group and then asks Frank specifically, "How was your holiday? Did you see your family?" Frank responds by saying that he was with his parents and his kids' mother dropped off his three and five year old for a few hours. He smiles and says that it was really great to see them. John asks Frank to remind the group how often he gets to see his kids and Frank says that he can see them one day a week and only if his parents are there. Renee has re-entered the room by that time and is holding a few case files. She interjects to ask, "Frank, what do you need to do to be able to see your kids without supervision?" Frank says that he has to go for substance abuse treatment. Renee asks him why he hasn't done that yet and he replies that he can't take off of work to go to the agency for an evaluation. Renee says, "You know, Frank, a lot of the people in this group have had to go for substance abuse evaluations. They all have jobs, too, and yet they were able to get to their appointments. Why can't you manage to do it?" Frank says that he doesn't want his boss to know about his probation or his problem with drinking and he really needs this job. John then asks the group, "What do you guys think of this situation?" Another probationer, Michael, says, "I don't know what I would do if I couldn't see my kids. Don't you miss them? They probably really miss you, too." Frank says, "Yes, I really miss them but I just need to wait a few more weeks before I can take time off of work." Michael responds by saying that while Frank is waiting to get time off, his kids are wondering where their daddy is. Frank looks down at the floor. He says, "I know

you're right. I guess I'll have to figure it out." Renee says, "Yes, you will have to figure it out. That is your responsibility. Your kids are not the ones who should have to make sacrifices because of your mistakes. That's your job. I hope we can hear some good news about this next week."

Renee then turns to Matt and asks him if he wants to share with the group what has been going on with him. Matt tells the group that his mother died last week. Michael is sitting next to Matt and pats him on the back. He says, "I'm sorry, man". Several other guys offer their condolences quietly. Matt says that he is doing okay, that his mother was sick for a while, so he's glad that she is at peace now. He tears up a little when he says this. John asks him if he has a support system in his life right now to help him through this time. Matt says that he does, that his girlfriend has been really supportive, although she doesn't really know what to say. John says, "Well, it's important to have someone to talk to." Matt nods and says that he's doing okay.

Renee tells the group that that's all for tonight. They all stand and line up at the door before she leads them all back to the waiting room. John and I are left in the room and I say, "That was intense." He agrees and says that he's impressed with how much progress has made in terms of coping with his feelings. We both pack up to leave and say goodnight.

When Renee encourages Matt to share the news of his mother's death with the group, she is directing his expression of emotion. In doing so, Renee defines another feeling rule: expressions of sadness and grief are acceptable and encouraged in this group, as are sympathetic responses to the pain of others. The positive and supportive feedback that Matt receives from the group (as sanctioned and encouraged by the group facilitator) reinforces Matt's management and expression of his own emotions consistent with the group's feeling rules and models "good" emotion management for the rest of the participants.

### **“Pushing”: Balancing Confrontation with Respect**

The confrontational techniques often used in batterer intervention programs (requiring compliance to expected scripts, insistence that participants admit to their crimes, etc.) have been criticized for failing to motivate, and even alienating, participants who are typically resistant to intervention (Daniels & Murphy, 1997). The techniques used by facilitators of DV Unit groups can certainly be described as confrontational in that they very directly challenge probationer's abusive behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and

thoughts and will not accept excuses or justifications. Over the course of my observation, I came to think about the facilitators' efforts to elicit changes in the participants' language and thinking as "pushing" - a term that I believe connotes less aggression than the term 'confrontation' but which still suggests a purposefulness and firmness of approach. Essentially, pushing happens when facilitators or other group participants encourage a probationer to admit to abusive behaviors, face up to what they perceive as the individual's denial of responsibility, or examine a situation in a different way. It is a type of cognitive behavioral technique in that it encourages the men to restructure their thinking so as to produce positive effects on their feelings and behaviors. Like the establishment and enforcement of feeling rules that we see in POG, pushing is also a type of emotion management that the group facilitators enact with (or upon) the probationers; it is a way of shaping how the probationers feel about their past behaviors and their status as probationers. In the above example, Renee (the PO) picks up on Frank's (probationer) subtle avoidance of responsibility for not seeing his children. Frank tells the group that he cannot yet seek substance abuse treatment because he is concerned about the effect on his job. Renee, John, and some other group members steer his thinking away from an external attribution for the problem (the restrictions of work) and towards taking responsibility for the problem himself. When Michael (probationer) asks Frank if he misses his kids and tells him that his kids probably miss him, Michael is letting Frank know that he should be feeling guilty about that.

Pushing happens much more frequently in the clinical group than in POG. In general, because the newer probationers begin the group feeling suspicious, angry, and defensive, they are less receptive to the engage and confront approach that happens in the clinical group. Probationers "learn the ropes" of the DV group in POG and the foundation is laid for the more intense, interactive cognitive and emotion work that goes on in the clinical group.

A typical example of pushing in the clinical group context takes place when a probationer is put "in the hot seat", as several probationers have described it. This happens when a facilitator focuses on a particular probationer and questions that individual about aspects of his abusive behavior, compliance with conditions of

probation, victim-blaming, or other issues related to accountability. The example that follows, observed in a clinical group session in February 2007, illustrates the types of issues on which a probationer might be pushed and how that pushing takes place.

Renee (PO/facilitator) asked Alvaro (group member) what's been going on with him. He was kind of sketchy about it, he said everything's okay but, "I've been trying to work some things out with my ex-wife." And Renee asked what he has been trying to work out. And he said just stuff with child support, "I've been giving her money but she wants it taken out of my checks but I don't want that because I've been able to give it to her every week". He said, "Because I'm on probation, I have to just play the game with her, and be nice, and be all sweet, so that she doesn't screw me over." He said that if he does anything or says anything, because he's on probation, she can just call the cops, and he can end up in jail. Renee intervened and said, "Alvaro, it's your actions that have brought you to this point because you were violent and abusive, that's why you've ended up on probation. So when you say you're playing the game with your wife and that she's doing things to manipulate you, you have to remember why you're in this situation in the first place." He didn't really (acknowledge any understanding) of that. He said, "Yeah, but she pushes my buttons, she knows just what to say." His body language (head down) and tone (speaking softly) suggested to that he wasn't telling the whole story, he was talking around certain things, and Renee really pushed him on it. She said, "What is it that you've been talking about, tell us what the conversations were like, tell us how you've been handling it." He said his wife is constantly calling him, even though they're divorced, she's giving him a hard time about the child support. Renee said that usually your check is only garnished if you're not paying child support and she pointed out that by him giving his wife the money himself and not wanting it to be taken out of his paycheck, was it possibly a way of his being controlling? Alvaro maintained that his wife is playing games with him, that she's really manipulative. He kind of left the child support issue and was turning things around to focus on his wife's behavior, "she lies, she plays games." Renee asked him what she lies about and Alvaro said that he has the kids on the weekends, and his ex wife says that she's working, that she does an overnight or very late shift, and he said there are times when he's called her and she's been home at midnight when she says she's not coming home until 2 am. And he said, "I have a life too, and I'm dating someone and I'd like to be able to go out but she always says she's working so she can't take the kids." Then someone, I don't know if it was Renee or one of the other guys, asked him why he was calling her at midnight. And he said "Well, she works at Wendy's and I wanted her to pick up some food for me." And the other group members got a good laugh out of that and one of them said "You're having your ex-wife bring you food?!" So here he is, divorced from his wife, saying that she's manipulative and lying, he's having a relationship with another woman and the wife doesn't know about the other woman, and he's asking his ex-wife to bring him food when she gets off her shift. Everybody in the group was really chuckling about how he didn't see how he's being manipulative and he's



controlling the situation. Jesse (group member) said to him, “When you called at midnight, are you sure you really wanted food or were you checking up on her to find out if she was really there?” And Alvaro said, “Well yeah, I don’t like the idea of her being with someone else.” And Renee said, “But you’re seeing someone else!” And he said something like, “All men need to have a woman.” Which brought some chuckling and some eye-rolling from the rest of the guys. And Renee asked, “Why is it that you’re allowed to be with somebody but she’s not allowed to be with anybody?” And John (counselor/facilitator) said immediately, “You know what, I don’t buy it. I don’t buy this whole act of you turning everything around on your wife. What you said was really sexist, that it’s okay for you to sleep with somebody else but it’s not okay for her to even though you’re divorced.” John was very firm about it and really called him on the sexism and how Alvaro had a clear double standard for himself and for his wife. John then pointed out that Alvaro was actually being abusive to two women; he was being abusive to his ex wife by leading her to believe that they still have some kind of relationship and also to this other woman he’s seeing who he’s not being exactly faithful to her either since he still sort of has romantic feelings for his ex wife. John also said, “You know Alvaro, I get the feeling that there’s a lot that you’re not telling us and I know that because you’re squirming. You’re definitely hiding something.” The other guys agreed. Jesse said, “You might want to think about this other woman, too, and her feelings. If she thinks that you’re totally into the relationship, you’ve got to be careful about hurting her because you don’t want to end up in exactly the same situation that you were before.” Then Renee pointed out to Alvaro that when people are confronting him or trying to give him advice, he kind of puts his head down and it looks like he shuts down. That he’s not willing to kind of open his mind and accept the advice that the other guys are giving him. And he said, “I do feel kind of guilty about seeing somebody else and that my wife doesn’t know.” And Renee said, “These are the kinds of things that you need to bring to the group. If you’re being abusive, if you’re having conflicting feelings, you should bring it to the group, otherwise nothing will change. If you don’t want to open up and give everything honestly and openly here, you won’t get any feedback that’s going to help you change.”

In this example, a conversation which took place over the course of ten or fifteen minutes, Alvaro was pushed by his PO, the group counselor, and his fellow probationers about his controlling behavior of his ex-wife, his sexist belief about a sexual double-standard, his jealousy, his abusive behavior toward both his ex-wife and the woman he is dating by concealing his involvement with both women, and his reluctance to be open and honest with the group and with himself. This confrontation took place through (1) persistent questioning to elicit more (and more truthful) information, (2) reflection from peers (“You’re having your ex-wife bring you food?!”), (3) direct statements (“Alvaro,

it's your actions that have brought you to this point because you were violent and abusive..."), and (4) specific suggestions ("These are the kinds of things that you need to bring to the group.") In this particular instance, Alvaro eventually came to admit to feeling somewhat guilty about an aspect of his behavior. His emotions were effectively managed by the group to produce the desired outcome: an admission of guilt or shame.

In some instances, probing and challenging questions do not seem powerful enough to confront those probationers who are perceived by the group facilitators and other group members as being "in denial" and who refuse to admit to any abusive or even questionable behaviors. In cases like these, the probation officer's dual roles as group facilitator and law enforcement officer are particularly salient, in that, unlike the counselors, the PO has access to each probationer's case file. This access allows the PO to confront a probationer with facts directly from the file that the probationer is omitting, glossing over, or denying. I have termed this action *checking the file*. Checking the file is a powerful tool, one that can enable the PO to catch the probationer in a lie in the presence of his peers and hopefully chip away at what the facilitators perceive as his "false" narrative. The following is an example of how checking the file happened in a clinical group setting:

At some point (during a discussion), Renee (PO/facilitator) had gotten up and gotten Rodney's probation file, I guess with the intention of confronting him with some of his past behavior. So she was looking at his arrest history and was saying, "Well, you have quite a long history here." And Rodney said, "But I don't have a violent history". And Renee said, "Oh yes you do, you have an assault 2, an unlawful imprisonment, and a couple of other things." Rodney then tried to explain the assault charge, joking and making light of it. Then he said that he acknowledges that the assault happened but he doesn't dwell on the past, that the past doesn't have anything to do with his current relationship with his wife or anything like that. And both Renee and John (counselor/facilitator) said, "But that's why you're here, to learn about how your past behavior has affected other people and gotten you in this situation."

In this case, Rodney's self-presentation as a nonviolent person is directly challenged and thwarted by Renee's presentation of "the facts of the case." The case file is perceived by many group members as the "last word" on a probationer's guilt or innocence. Whereas Rodney was probably frustrated when confronted with the facts of

his criminal history, other group members told me that they appreciate checking the file as a way of forcing resistant probationers to own up to their crimes and play the role that is expected of them in the group. One of the probationers who has demonstrated acceptance of the group norms described checking the file in the following way:

“I like Officer Holmes because she has all the police files, so I like that all these guys are saying, “no, that’s not what happened”, but right there in black and white, signed by them and a police officer and a judge, says exactly what happened. So it’s like, I think it’s good, especially for me, myself, you know,...it keeps you honest. Although these guys’ll, you know, once you leave the class, they’ll say, “no, that cop didn’t know what he was talking about”, or, you know, but it’s all there in black and white.” –Drew

Checking the file is a clear example of the *institutional emotion management* that takes place in the group. Hochschild (1993) differentiates the emotion management that is enacted in one’s personal or social life from the methods by which institutions (companies, prisons, schools, etc.), through rules and customs, manage the emotions of the actors within the institution’s sphere. The case file is an official document produced by an institution of authority which the POs use to leverage probationers’ production and expression of particular emotions. The authority the case file holds in this setting limits the probationer’s agency in producing and expressing emotions freely, according to his own determination of what is appropriate. Certainly, the probation officer’s status of authority serves much the same purpose. Yet, the presence of an actual document which (to some probationers, at least) represents the truth adds a level of officiality and certainty to the PO’s role.

How is that men like Alvaro and Rodney, men who have demonstrated violent and abusive behavior, are not provoked to anger and aggression by intense confrontation from both authority figures and peers? It seems that group facilitators, particularly in the clinical group, have created within each group an environment in which the rules of interaction and behavioral expectations are clear and in which the probationers feel enough emotional safety to tolerate personal confrontation. The data suggest to me that the foundation of this safe environment is mutual respect among facilitators and probationers. Staff members believe that the balance between respectful engagement and

confrontation is an important aspect of successful intervention with probationers. One staff member described it this way:

“I see absolutely no way to get an improvement from showing disrespect for (the probationers). Because that’s what we’re trying, to get them to respect others. If we don’t model respect, what in heaven’s name are we doing? With some of the other probationers, we’re probably the first people that ever made them accountable for anything. Sometimes they come from places...where people have been running interference for them, making excuses and they have no idea. And it certainly doesn’t lead to maturity.”

Many of the probationers who have been participating in group for several months indicate respect for their POs and counselors. There is an evident balance of approachability and authoritative limit-setting that they seem to appreciate, as expressed in this probationer’s description of his PO:

“She was just great. She was funny, she was nice, she just would listen and then she would correct you if you were wrong. Like she’d go right to your file and be like, ‘Oh yeah? This is what happened’. She’s like, ‘I have (the information) all right here’.”

Another probationer describes his group counselor this way:

“...everything that these guys are saying, (the counselor) comes back right at them. She’s very like, on the ball in, in, you know, in my perspective and she knows what she’s talking about. And, again, she’s coming through with facts, you know, and these papers that she hands out. These are all studies, so even before she was even in school to learn this, there was people doing it. So she studied on, you know, and she knows what she’s talking about.”

Of course, not all probationers are so positive about the group or its facilitators. Whereas I did not interpret any of the interactions that I observed in group as disrespectful of probationers, some probationers reported in interviews feeling little respect toward or from the POs or counselors. They also reported that other probationers, even those who appear to be respectful in group, express their dislike of the facilitators when talking in the waiting room or while smoking outside before group. These responses came from probationers who showed signs of significant resistance to the intervention. These cases are discussed in detail later in this chapter and in the following chapter.

Another possible explanation as to why probationers with aggressive histories are not prompted to aggression when confronted in group is that both the social and criminal consequences for doing so are severe enough to be avoided. Acting out aggressively in group could lead to dismissal from the group, intensified supervision, and/or a violation of probation, penalties which, for some, may be unpleasant enough to prompt them to control their aggressive impulses.

### **Pro-social Interactions and Support**

Just as interaction between facilitators and group members is different in POG than in the clinical group, so is the interaction among group members in each type of group. Whereas POG members are quieter and tend to interact very little with one another during group, in the clinical group, I found a strong sense of both camaraderie and mutual support among the probationers. Clinical group participants are likely to have been in group together for several months and have had the opportunity to get to know one and trust one another. Since POG members are all relatively new to group, they have had less opportunity to feel comfortable with fellow group members and with the context itself. Further, the more didactic nature of POG provides fewer opportunities for exchange among probationers. This section will examine the positive interactions among clinical group members and the ways in which they provide one another with emotional support.

The first evidence I observed of pro-social interactions among clinical group members appeared at the very first session I attended. The probationers entered the small room where group was held and greeted each other warmly. I observed them following the group protocol of payment and preparing to be breathalyzed while they casually and quietly interacted with one another. Certainly some of the probationers appeared more relaxed than others, but the overall tone in the room was calm. I experienced this sense of relaxed togetherness many times over the course of observation, particularly in the weeks after a holiday or inclement weather when the probationers had not seen one another for a while.

That same first session, a probationer named Jesse shared his feelings about a recent situation in which he had been threatened by the ex-boyfriend of the woman he

was dating. He had decided to end the relationship. As he spoke, there was a respectful quiet and stillness in the room as the other group members listened intently, some leaning forward a little in their seats.

(Jesse) mentioned feeling anxious about the situation, worried for his safety, constantly looking over his shoulder. And he also mentioned the pain that he feels about ending this relationship. There were some nods of support... the guys in the group clearly seemed to feel badly for him and understand where he was coming from, the pain of losing a relationship and also the worry about jeopardizing their situation. During the course of this discussion, after Jesse mentioned feeling lonely, one of the probationers offered to give Jesse his phone number so that they could be in touch. The probation officer in the group gently told the group that they should not be socializing with one another outside of the group. That elicited nods of understanding from the group members.

This example, like the earlier excerpt in which the probationer Matt receives support about the death of his mother, exemplifies the ways in which emotions are managed not just by the group facilitators, but also by group members themselves. Members of the clinical group encourage their peers to express painful emotions such as grief and anxiety and indicate their support through body language (nodding, patting on the back) and verbalizations (“I’m sorry, man”). Whereas feeling anger, resentment, or jealousy toward a former partner is actively discouraged in the group both by facilitators and members (as in the earlier example with Alvaro), expressions of vulnerability are encouraged. These boundaries on emotional expression and the discouragement of even experiencing certain emotions like anger represent important feeling rules that are fundamental in the clinical group.

### **Examining Gender and Sexism**

True to the goals of the Duluth Model batterer intervention programs, the DV unit group is a forum in which ideas about gender role stereotypes and sexist attitudes are explored. Group members immediately become aware of how they speak about women when they are told that the group rules include refraining from referring to women as “girls” or calling them by derogatory names like “bitch.” Discussions about issues of gender and sexism would sometimes arise naturally from the things that participants would say. The facilitators’ responses to sexist comments would often lead to closer

examinations of the attitudes and beliefs that belied the comments. The following excerpt from field notes taken in a clinical group is an example of a conversation about stereotypes in which several group members participated.

Jesse was discussing how he sometimes feels ‘OCD’ when he cleans his apartment and he gave an example of how a woman in his building stopped by and said ‘wow, your apartment is so neat and clean; I’m a woman and my apartment isn’t this clean.’ And John (the counselor) interrupted and pointed out that there was a stereotype about gender. A couple of guys said, ‘Yeah, that stereotype isn’t really true, there are plenty of men who are neat and plenty of women who are messy.’ And John said, ‘Yes, but the stereotype is the guy who lives alone, he’s got 20 pizza boxes in the apartment, clothes everywhere, and women are more tidy and take care of things like that, and that is the stereotype, that is the traditional way of thinking about gender.’ And then John brought up another stereotype. He wanted them to look at a situation in which an 8 year old boy might be playing with a Barbie and there was an immediate reaction at first. One of the guys said, ‘Well, you take the Barbie doll away.’ And then Rodney said, ‘You have to explain why he shouldn’t have it’. John really pushed on the issue and asked, ‘Why? Why shouldn’t he have it?’ There was some hedging then, the guys kind of backed off, saying things like, ‘Well, you know, men don’t want their sons to be gay...’ Jesse was really on top of it and said, ‘It doesn’t mean he’s gay because he wants to play with Barbie dolls.’ The group struggled with this a little bit, some backed off a bit, but there were a few people like who didn’t really seem to get it, it didn’t really click to them that it was okay for a boy to be playing with a Barbie doll, that there’s nothing wrong with it. Then John said, ‘What if a girl wants to play football? Someone answered, ‘Then she’s just a tomboy.’ And John explored that with them and, again, some of them really seemed to understand but some were still struggling.

Another example in which gender role attitudes were examined involved one of the probationers, again Jesse, describing a situation in which he was being threatened and harassed by the ex-boyfriend of a woman he was currently dating. Because he feared for his safety and placing his probation in jeopardy by getting into an altercation, Jesse decided to end the relationship with the woman and file a police report against the ex-boyfriend. Most of the other group members were supportive of this course of action except Alvaro (discussed earlier) who objected. He told Jesse that he shouldn’t “get punked out by some guy”, that if he liked the girl, he should continue to see her. This led to a conversation about masculinity and the idea that standing up to someone and risking

a fight is seen as the “male” thing to do. In field notes, I described the counselor John’s response to this situation:

John talked a little about how many men grow up in environments where it’s appropriate to go after someone if they look at you the wrong way and he said that that’s not the real world, that that’s not really how problems get solved in the world, and he said really taking care of yourself involves knowing how not to put yourself in a situation that’s threatening to you in the first place.

## **Power and Control**

Also consistent with the Duluth Model are group discussions about the power and control motive for abuse. Group facilitators often pointed out indications of the power and control motive in the behavior of the participants and often the group members themselves were able to identify it in their fellow participants as well. For example, Rodney, a probationer with several months of experience in the clinical group, described asking his wife directly if she was ever afraid of him. Both the group facilitators and participants were quick to point out that Rodney’s directness may have been intimidating to his wife and that, by putting her in a position in which she had to answer this question, Rodney may have been trying to exert his control over her. Group members suggested to Rodney that his behavior, though not physically or even verbally assaultive, could easily be interpreted as abusive and controlling.

If we look at the power and control motive for abuse as stemming from particular emotions, for example, fear of being controlled or emasculated or anger at a perceived insult or threat, questioning motives in this way can be seen as another example of emotion management in the group. In this case, past behaviors are examined for the feelings that may have motivated them. Isn’t it possible, the group members ask Rodney, that you were really acting out of a feeling of helplessness and desire for control, rather than just curiosity as you claim? Pointing out the potential power and control motive behind a behavior is a way of interjecting emotions into a discussion about behavior.

## **Parenting and Relationships**

Many conversations about issues surrounding parenting and managing relationships take place in the clinical group. These discussions have the same focus on



accountability and personal responsibility as all others in the DV groups. The earlier description of Alvaro's problems with his ex-wife are an example of how sexist and controlling thinking about women is challenged in group discussions. The example below illustrates how healthy relationship skills such as good communication are encouraged in group discussions.

Arlene (PO) also encouraged Matt to really communicate with his girlfriend about (his mother's death). Matt said that he mentions it, it's not like he necessarily avoids the subject, but he doesn't want to be talking about it all the time. I guess he feels like he doesn't want to be complaining and talking about sad things all the time. And he gets the sense that she doesn't want to bring it up and ask if he's okay because she doesn't want to upset him and she doesn't really know how to deal with it. He said that what she mostly says to him is that she can't imagine what he feels like. And Arlene said that the way that he communicated that feeling just now to the group was exactly how he could say it to her. Matt had said that it would be nice if his girlfriend could ask him about it sometimes, instead of him having to bring it up. And Arlene encouraged him to communicate with his girlfriend in the way he had with us. She asked the group, "Did everyone understand what Matt meant when he said that?" And everyone sort of nodded and said "yeah, we understood".

Many of the probationers in the clinical group have children. Most do not live with their children but do have visitation or some regular caretaking responsibilities. Facilitators often encourage group members to talk about the effects of domestic violence on their children and to be honest with themselves and the group about the harm to which they might have exposed their children. After one probationer recounted how he asked his young son if his mother (the probationer's former girlfriend) was dating anyone, a counselor gave the following response: "John made it very clear, whatever you do, don't bring your son into these kinds of interactions. He said, 'That goes for everyone here, don't bring your kids into this kind of stuff.'" Being parents seems to be a source of pride for many of the group members and they are quick to challenge any other member they feel are not living up to their responsibilities, as the following example illustrates:

The guys in the group, particularly Matt and James, really pushed Vinnie on his decisions in the past not to have supervised visitation and what the consequences of those decisions are. Basically instead of having supervised visitation, because he was insulted by the fact that he to be supervised while he was spending time with his own kids, Vinnie chose not to see them at all. And the guys and (facilitators) Bart and Vickie really were able to show him how meaningless that

was now when really time is passing and it's time that you're not spending with your children.

Group members are also encouraged to engage in problem-solving around parenting issues, particularly issues of co-parenting. Rather than continuing to place the children in the middle of conflicts between themselves and their former partners, as many of the probationers do, they are encouraged to focus on their own behavior and the things that are under their influence. Facilitators make some practical suggestions but generally prefer to let the group members provide advice and feedback to one another. This is exemplified below.

So to move Les away from talking about his wife and complaining about her situation, Bart (PO) asked the group, "What is it that Les can do to help his kids have better boundaries when they are staying with him?" He wanted to focus Les on what he can do in the two or three days in the week that he has the kids, because he said, "There's nothing you can do about it when they're with your ex wife." And James said, "You're the father, when they're not listening to you because they're watching tv, then you turn the tv off". There was a lot of discussion about parenting issues. It seems that Les still does a lot of negotiating with the kids and it's not really very effective. A few of the guys encouraged him to use simple rewards and punishment to get the kids to do what you want. And James again (he was very vocal during this group) reminded Les that he has to take responsibility for his own parenting in the past and that this is part of what the consequences are. So Les seemed able to accept that.

Because many of the probationers feel a strong sense of pride in their roles as fathers, one of the underlying norms of the group is to always put one's child's needs ahead of one's own. When this norm is violated, as in the example above in which a probationer was perceived as putting his child in the middle of his relationship with the child's mother, a feeling rule is enforced. Probationers will try to signal to others that the appropriate emotion in such a situation is guilt. When James in the above example tells Les that he has to "take responsibility for his own parenting in the past" and that Les' current struggles with parenting are the consequences of his own past behaviors, he is attempting to induce remorse for those behaviors and a motivation to correct them in the future. This is yet another example of the ways in which emotions management is taking place in the group intervention.

## ***Staff Perspectives***

The staff members whom I interviewed included the unit's Supervising Probation Officer, three Senior Probation Officers, one counselor, and the program's clinical supervisor. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about the unit and how it works (some of which information has been included in previous sections) and to obtain staff members' perspectives on the probationers and the services delivered by the unit.

### **Program Strengths**

According to the staff members I interviewed, one of the unit's primary strengths is the consistency in attitude and approach with which staff members—both Probation and VIBS staff—interact with the probationers. POs and counselors know that they can rely on one another and on their supervisors to take a zero tolerance approach to inappropriate behavior on the part of the probationers. They also know that they are part of a supportive team of professionals and that their colleagues are available for consultation and advice on clinical or procedural matters.

The pairing of POs and counselors in facilitating groups is regarded as a sound and successful approach to increasing accountability among the probationers. The counselor whom I interviewed expressed appreciation for the PO's knowledge of the individual probationer's case, knowledge which can be used to confront the probationers and hold them accountable for their behavior. This individual also added that the PO serves a therapeutic role as well as representing the law enforcement perspective. POs also appreciate the knowledge and skill of the counselors with whom they co-facilitate groups and feel that there is much that they can learn from observing the counselors interact with the probationers.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

Staff members described similar theoretical orientations about the etiology of and best interventions for domestic violence. They consistently referenced "power and control issues" as part of what motivates the probationers' abusive behavior and also mentioned substance abusive, mental illness, and troubled family histories as challenges

faced by the probationers they serve. Also mentioned was an attitude of entitlement and a sense of being “above the law” that motivated some probationers to continue offending. There was agreement that, with the exception of a few probationers whose difficulties are far too complicated to be addressed well in the group context, all of the men sentenced to the DV unit belong there and can benefit from the intervention. Group facilitators described learning much of what they know about domestic violence from participating in monthly (or bimonthly for counselors) supervision, discussing issues with colleagues, and reading.

Hochschild (1979, 1983) argues that ideology has a significant effect on emotion. What we believe influences how we define events and experiences which, in turn, influences our rules of behavior and feeling (Francis, 1997). The dominant ideology about domestic violence among those who work with the DV unit probationers is that abuse is, at least in part, caused by sexist attitudes and beliefs and men’s desire to control their female partners. This belief is enacted in group through the feeling rules that are established for the probationers. Group facilitators explicitly guide members away from their feelings of anger and resentment and toward feeling guilt and “remind” them of their underlying motivations to obtain or maintain control, as illustrated in the sections above. In her work on emotion management in support groups, Francis (1997) describes how group counselors “introduce the theoretical (and ideological) framework in which they were trained, which will shape the definitions that they negotiate with their clients” (p. 154). Whereas the counselors in Francis’s support groups work to transform their clients’ experiences into those which create and maintain a positive identity, the DV group facilitators are doing much the opposite: by repeatedly reminding group members of the fact that they are on probation for abusive acts that they committed, they are trying to compel them to accept the negative identity of the abuser. This, the staff members believe, is the first step toward changing one’s negative attitudes and behaviors. Once the probationers have taken responsibility for past wrongs, they can begin to work on correcting them before they happen again.

## **Change and Success**

The probation staff members reported that they feel that the intensive supervision provided by the unit is very successful, especially considering the high rate of recidivism among domestic violence offenders. There is a general sense among all of the staff members whom I interviewed that the group intervention was successful in holding probationers accountable for their crimes, but there was also agreement that it is extremely difficult to know whether or not the group is actually effective in reducing violent behavior. Nevertheless, all staff members interviewed felt positively about the intervention and expressed their confidence that they are providing a worthwhile service.

When asked how they assess change among probationers, the group facilitators I interviewed said that they listen carefully to the stories the men tell and monitor the changes in attitude that come through in these stories. (The role of the story in the process of change is discussed further in chapter 6.) There was agreement that attitude shifts cannot be expected until the probationer has participated in group long enough for some of his defenses to break down. All three group facilitators interviewed independently of one another mentioned 30 to 35 weeks of group participation as a common “turning point” for probationers who have been resistant to intervention. While there is no empirical support for this theory, the group facilitators believe that many probationers begin to come around to a shift in thinking and attitude during that time period.

## **Collaboration**

Supervisors and group facilitators all expressed enthusiasm for the collaborative relationship between the Probation Department and VIBS. Staff from both organizations treat one another with respect and professionalism and collaborate to provide the most consistent and effective services possible. Group facilitators reported that supervision is informative and practical. The only criticism of the partnership is regarding the managing of probationer fees and record-keeping. Some staff members described confusion over probationer’s balances and attendance that were addressed during group, taking time away from the intervention.

## **Summary of the DV Unit Group Intervention**

Much of what takes place in the Suffolk County Probation Department's DV intervention is consistent with the descriptions of other programs in the literature. Like many BIPs, this program is, overall, in line with the Duluth Model (discussed in chapters 1 and 2) in that its orientation is toward teaching men to understand the roles of power, control, and sexism in their abusive behavior and to disabuse men of the notion that their victims are to blame. Suffolk's DV program also has some elements of a cognitive-behavior orientation, again like many other BIPs, but CBT techniques are almost never explicitly taught to probationers. The linkages between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors seem to underlie many of the conversations initiated by group facilitators, but strategies common to CBT such as thought-stopping or weighing the evidence for and against a belief, are not a part of the group intervention. Some references to anger management techniques, like paying attention to the physiological cues preceding an outburst or coming to understand one's anger triggers, were also observed in group but are not taught in any didactic way.

One element of the intervention that sets it apart from similar programs, is the presence of the probation officers in the group. Though this model probably exists in probation departments in other jurisdictions, this author was unable to find any references to similar programs in the academic literature. It seems that the PO's ability to "check the file" does have a positive effect on their success in uncovering some of the probationers' dishonesty and denial of responsibility. Denial and minimization are characteristic of batterers participating in interventions (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005; Smith, 2007). The probation officers' challenges to a probationer's claims of innocence seem to make a significant impression on other group members and disarms the probationer of his typical defenses. However, whether or not this type of exposure actually leads to behavior changes in the batterers is still unknown.

## **CHAPTER 5 Domestic Violence Unit Probationers**

The data contained in this section were obtained from the Pre-sentence Investigation (PSI) reports of men who were sentenced to the DV unit and attended at least one group session during in 2004 or 2005. A detailed description of the sample is included in Chapter 3 of this document. What follows are demographic, psychosocial, criminal, and probation outcome data for 77 probationers in the DV unit.

### ***Demographic and Psychosocial Data***

More than half (54.1%) of the probationers in this sample are Caucasian, 23.0% are Black/African American, and 18.9% are Hispanic.

In this sample, 84.2% were United States citizens. Of the 15.8% who were citizens of other countries, three-quarters were from Latin American countries.

More than half (65.8%) of the probationers reported being employed at the time of the PSI. Forty-nine percent reported having a stable job history, 34.5 reported a sporadic job history, and 16.4 reported no job history. Just under sixteen percent (15.7%) of the probationers were receiving public assistance at the time of the PSI.

The average age of the probationers at the time of the PSI was 38 years. The youngest probationer in the sample was 20 and the oldest was 69. The average number of completed years of schooling for this sample was 11.8. Approximately half (54.9%) of the probationers were high school graduates and 19.7% completed at least one year of schooling beyond the twelfth grade.

Almost thirty-eight percent (37.8%) of the probationers in this sample were married at the time of their PSIs. Divorced or separated probationers comprised 29.7% of the sample. Almost twenty (19.4) percent of the sample reported that they were living with a spouse or partner, 48.6% with family members other than spouses, 20.8% alone, and 6.9% with friends. The remaining 4.2% were incarcerated, or in sober houses. The mean number of children probationers had is 2.2.

## **Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse**

A large majority (81.3%) of the probationers in this sample reported themselves as in good health, 12.0% said that they were in fair health, and 6.7% described themselves as in poor health. When asked about their history of mental health treatment, more than half (58.7%) reported no history of mental health treatment. Just over one-third (33.3%) reported a past history of mental health treatment and 8.0% reported that they were currently involved in treatment.

When asked about substance use, 60.8% said that they currently used alcohol and 24.0% admitted to current use of illegal drugs. In 27.1% of the cases, substance use was said to have had an impact on the current offense. Over one-third (35.1%) of the probationers in the sample reported having received some type of substance abuse treatment. Of those with a treatment history, 48.1% reported at least one inpatient substance abuse treatment stay. In 27.1% of the cases reviewed, substance abuse was listed as having an impact on the present offense.

Almost one quarter (24%) reported having a history of both mental health treatment and substance abuse treatment.



**Table 3. Psychosocial, Health, Mental Health and Substance Use Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Race		Health Status	
Caucasian	54.1	Good	81.3
Black/African American	23.0	Fair	12.0
Hispanic	18.9	Poor	6.7
Other	4.1	Mental Health Tx History	
Citizenship		None	58.7
U.S.	84.2	Past	33.3
Non-U.S	15.8	Current	8.9
Living Arrangement		Substance Use History	
Spouse or partner	19.4	Current Alcohol	60.8
Family member other than spouse	48.6	Current Drugs	24.0
Friend	6.9	Past Tx History	35.1
Alone	20.8	Impact on Present Offense	27.1
Other	4.2	History of mental health and substance abuse treatment	24.0

Marital Status			
Married	37.8		
Divorced/separated	29.7		
Education level			
Did not graduate H.S.	45.1		
H.S. graduate	54.9		

### ***Criminal History Data***

Determined by the dates of probationers' first and most recent offenses at the time of PSI, the mean length of criminal career for the DV Unit probationers was 12.9 years with a standard deviation of 11.1 years and a range of 1 to 41 years. The mean number of arrests during criminal career was 7.4 with a standard deviation of 5.3 and a range of 1 to 25 arrests. Juvenile arrests are not included in these numbers since they were not typically or consistently reported in PSI documents. More than one third (38.9%) of the sample, had been imprisoned at some point in their criminal histories and almost half (46.8%) had been sentenced to probation at least once prior to the instant offense.

The current charges (those for which the offender received a sentence the probation sentence leading to supervision in the DV unit) are listed in Table 4. The most common charge was criminal contempt in the second degree.

**Table 4. Criminal Charges for Current Offense**

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
criminal contempt 2	33	44.6
assault 3	16	21.6

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
criminal contempt 1	5	6.8
assault 2	2	2.7
menacing 2	2	2.7
criminal mischief 4	2	2.7
menacing 3	1	1.4
aggravated harassment 2	1	1.4
disorderly conduct	1	1.4
petit larceny	1	1.4
DWI	1	1.4
attempted assault 2	1	1.4
attempted burglary 2	1	1.4
attempted stalking 3	1	1.4
criminal contempt degree unspecified	1	1.4
endangering the welfare of a child	1	1.4
making a punishable false written statement	1	1.4

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid %</b>
reckless endangerment 2	1	1.4
resisting arrest	1	1.4
unlawful imprisonment 2	1	1.4
missing	3	
Total	77	

When more than one final charges were listed, secondary charges included the following, as listed in Table 5.

**Table 5. Secondary final charges**

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
DWI	3
aggravated criminal contempt	1
aggravated unlawful operation of a vehicle 2	1
aggravated unlawful operation of a vehicle 3	1
attempted assault- no degree specified	1
attempted assault 2	1
attempted criminal contempt 2	1
criminal contempt 2	1
criminal mischief 4	1
petite larceny	1

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
criminal possession of a weapon	1
rape 1	1
rape 3	1
resisting arrest	1
stalking 4	1
harassment 2	1
sexual abuse1	1

The charges made against the probationers in the sample over the course of their criminal histories, excluding present offenses, are listed in table 6.

**Table 6. Charges over course of criminal histories**

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Number of Probationers</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
disorderly conduct	22	28.6
DWAI	21	27.3
criminal contempt 2	18	23.4
harassment 2	15	19.5
assault 3	14	18.2
DWI	14	18.2
harassment 1	7	9.1

<b>Criminal Charge</b>	<b>Number of Probationers</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
criminal contempt 1	5	6.5
assault 2	4	5.2
menacing 3	3	3.9
aggravated harassment 2	3	3.9
petite larceny	3	3.9
menacing 2	2	2.6
assault 1	1	1.3
menacing 1	1	1.3
sexual misconduct	1	1.3

For the present offenses, 9.5% of probationers were given sentences of one year on probation, 73.0 were given three years on probation, and 17.5% were given five years on probation.

The relationships of the victims to the probationers in the instant offenses are listed in the table below.

**Table 7. Relationship of victim to probationer**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid % of Total</b>
Wife	25	35.2
Girlfriend/significant other	15	21.1
Ex-wife (including separated)	13	18.3

Ex-girlfriend	16	22.5
Other	1	2.8
Missing	6	
Total	77	

### ***Probationer Outcomes***

This study examined the intervention outcomes of the probationers who were referred to the DV Unit batterers group and attended at least one group session during 2004 or 2005 and the criminal outcomes of those same probationers two years post sentencing. The intervention outcomes include the elapsed number of days between sentencing and first group session attended, group completion status (completed or uncompleted), and the number of elapsed weeks from first group session to completion. The criminal outcome variables examined are the number and types of arrests (when known) and the number of violations of probation (VOP) between the probationers' dates of sentencing to exactly two years hence.

The sample included 77 probationers who were sentenced to probation and assigned to the domestic violence unit during the years 2004 and 2005. All of these probationers attended at least one session of the DV group. The shortest number of elapsed days between sentencing and the first group session attended was 8 and the longest was 280. The mean number of elapsed days between sentencing and first group session attended was 70.7 (or approximately 10 weeks) with a standard deviation of 61.7 days. These data are important in that criminal justice officials working with domestic violence cases have recommended that the time between sentencing and the beginning of treatment should be under six weeks in order to increase the likelihood of program completion (Healy, Smith & O'Sullivan, 1998).

Just under half (47.4%) of the probationers in this sample successfully completed the group; that is, they were deemed by the probation department to have attended a sufficient number of sessions and achieved the goals of the intervention (as outlined in chapter 4). Though the group is said to last a minimum of 52 weeks, the records of three

probationers in the sample indicated fewer than 52 weeks of attendance (42, 48, and 49 weeks respectively). The greatest number of weeks of attendance among those who completed the group was 123 weeks for one probationer. The mean number of weeks of from first session to completion was 71.9.

Of the 77 cases studied, data on arrests were obtained from 67. Twenty-eight (41.8% of cases for which data were obtained) were arrested at least once during the two years following sentencing.

**Table 8. Arrests and violation of probation (VOP) within two years post-sentencing**

<b>Arrested</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Yes	39	58.2
No	28	41.8
Missing	10	
Total	77	
<b>DV Arrest</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Yes	14	21.9
No	43	67.2
Unknown	7	10.9
Missing	13	
Total	77	
<b>VOP</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
Yes	6	33.3
No	12	15.6



Missing	59	
Total	77	

Because the criminal records of the probationers that were accessed for this study included only the criminal charges and dates of arrests, and information about the specific nature of the crimes alleged (such as the relationship of the victim to the probationer) was absent, it was not feasible to conclude whether certain of the charges constituted domestic violence-related crimes. For example, among the charges for which probationers in this sample were arrested subsequent to sentencing were criminal contempt, menacing, harassment, and sexual abuse; these charges might have involved victims other than partners. Fourteen (14) case records did specify that arrests were made for domestic violence related charges. In seven (7) other cases it could not be determined whether the charges were domestic violence related and these cases are counted as unknown. Records indicated that 43 probationers (67.2% of the cases for which data were obtained) had no arrests for domestic violence related crimes in the two years following sentencing.

The arrest records of the probationers were examined to determine the likelihood that probationers who completed the group were less likely to be arrested during the two years subsequent to sentencing. The data show no such differences between the completer and noncompleter groups in terms of subsequent arrests, as shown in the crosstabulation in Table 9. These data suggest that completing the group has no significant effect on subsequent arrests.

**Table 9. Crosstabulation of group completion and arrest within two years post-sentencing**

			arrest		Total
			no	yes	
Completed group?	no	Count	17	15	32
		% of Total	25.8%	22.7%	48.5%
	yes	Count	21	13	34
		% of Total	31.8%	19.7%	51.5%
Total	Count		38	28	66
	% of Total		57.6%	42.4%	100.0%

Crosstabulations looking at the demographic and psychosocial characteristics of probationers who completed the group and those who did not, revealed no significant differences between the two groups in terms of race, US citizenship status, employment status, mental health history, physical health history, substance use, impact of substance use on current offense, or history of previous probation sentences or incarceration. Essentially, the probationers in this sample who completed the group appear no from different than those who did not complete the group. Crosstabulations were also performed to test for a relationship between the above listed demographic, psychosocial, and criminal history variables and arrests within the two years subsequent to sentencing. No significant relationships were found.

The literature review in chapter 2 provides an overview of the conflicting evidence of BIP effectiveness. The absence of an observed program effect in this study is consistent with much of the literature on BIPs (Labriola, Rempel & Davis, 2005; see Feder & Wilson, 2005 for meta-analytic review). However, other studies have demonstrated at least moderate program effects (Jones, D’Agostino, Gondolf & Heckert, 2004, Palmer, et al, 1992; Tutty, et al, 2001). Some researchers have concluded that the effectiveness of BIPs on reducing reassault is unknown (Hamberger & Hastings, 1993). As discussed in chapter 1, the data presented here offer a description of Suffolk County

Probation's DV program participants but the methodology limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the program's effectiveness. Furthermore, both the sample size and the extent of missing data in the probationers' records severely limit these analyses.

**Table 10. Crosstabulations of Group Completion and Criminal History Variables**

		Arrest			DV Arrest				VOP		
		No	Yes	Total	No	Yes	Unknown	Total	No	Yes	Total
Completed group	No	17	15	32	20	7	5	32	7	6	13
	Yes	21	13	34	22	7	2	31	5	0	5
	Total	38	28	66	42	14	7	63	12	6	18

**Table 11. Crosstabulation of group completion, citizenship and race.**

		U.S. Citizenship			Race			
		No	Yes	Total	White	black/AfAm	Hispanic	other
Completed group	No	8	31	39	16	11	8	2
	Yes	4	32	36	24	6	5	2
	Total	12	63	75	40	17	13	3

**Table 12. Crosstabulation of group completion and health variables.**

		Physical Health Status				Substance Abuse Treatment History			Mental Health Treatment History			
		Good	Fair	Poor	Total	Yes	No	Total	No History	Prior History	Current Involvement	Total
Completed group	No					26	14	40	25	13	1	39
	Yes					23	13	36	18	12	5	35
	Total					49	27	76	43	25	6	74

## ***Probationers' Perceptions of the DV Unit***

Probationers who enter the DV unit hold a variety of perspectives about their offenses, the criminal justice system and probation, and themselves. It is through these varying perspectives that each probationer views his experience in the unit and as a group member. As discussed earlier, some probationers are resistant to the rules, procedures, and activities of the group, whereas others come to appreciate the group as a place in which learning and personal growth can occur. The overall attitudes of the probationers who were interviewed for this study include the positive, the negative, and the ambivalent. In interviews about the probationers' experiences in group and in the unit in general, a number of themes emerged.

### **Feeling Stifled**

One of the most common complaints voiced by the more resistant probationers is that they feel that they are not allowed to freely express themselves in group. Some are frustrated that they cannot say what they would like to say about themselves, their partners, or probation without a counselor telling them that they are wrong. Some of the probationers expressed these feelings in the following statements.

“Um, we're all frightened to say anything. We just shut our mouth. And it shouldn't be, I don't think a program like this should really be like that...I think you should be allowed to express yourself, in a righteous manner, showing respect to both the Officer and the counselor that's in the room...But that's not the case.”  
—Sam in interview

Rebecca: You mentioned that you've learned a little bit about the different kinds of abuse in the class. What else have you learned if anything in the =

Pat: To keep my mouth shut. Because I speak my mind you know it's, you know.

Rebecca: What happens when you speak your mind?

Pat: [I spoke up to the counselor] and she said, “You know, you're very argumentative” and now every time I open my mouth these people are going to think well he's argumentative. And you just put a label on me. And because I don't agree with what you said, I'm argumentative. I said this is a free country. Freedom of speech. I said it's not healthy to be a yes person. OK, I says me and my wife argued a lot, not probably as much as your parents did you know. Uh, but uh and it's always healthy to argue, you know.

“I do have a gripe with anybody who—because in the midst of telling somebody something about a problem that you may have, you might not realize it but stagnating a person from being able to say what's on their mind could create, you know, strife in that moment. That's how I feel. When I'm explaining something or expressing something, I'm really cleansing my soul, so to speak. And when somebody stops me from speaking about a situation that I might have gone through, that automatically kind of makes me retract. And now I don't want to say anything.” -Larry in interview

Some probationers say that they are willing to endure the consequences of speaking up in group rather than having to conform to group norms. For example, Pat (quoted above) said this about his participation in the group:

“If I don't agree with something, either I bite my tongue or I say... I mean, I resigned myself to the fact that I may spend a year in this class. I won't get moved on. Because I'm not going you know conform just - I've always, you know, lived my life speaking up...and this is the way I am.”

### **Staying Out of Trouble**

Both in group discussions and in their interviews with me, probationers discussed the influence of probation in keeping them out of trouble. For some, the restrictions imposed by a probation sentence and the always-looming risk of being sent to jail on a violation prevent them from slipping back into abusive ways or engaging in other potentially harmful activities like drinking or driving with a suspended license.

“Um, you really are more careful. You know, you're more careful what you say to people. It's a lot easier to follow this program when you're on probation, you know, because you don't want to get in trouble. You know if you do get in trouble, you're going to jail. And, you know, that does make it easier, you know, it's uh, it's a big, you know, weight over your shoulders, you know, saying that, you know, we're giving you the opportunity to do the right thing, but if you don't, you know, there's a lot of trouble, so. You know, that helps.” -Matt from interview

These probationers seem to accept the limits that have been imposed upon them as consequences of their own behavior. Some worry about how they will behave once

the restrictions have been lifted, but others feel that probation has given them the opportunity to change things about the way they live.

“Using these techniques and staying on my toes and doing the right thing. It’s like, habit forming for me. Just like I had the habits of doing bad things, I’m getting into the habit of doing the right thing.” –Drew in interview

In some cases, staying out of trouble means backing down in conflicts which, in the past, these probationers probably would have engaged without hesitation. In group both Jesse and Alvaro described situations in which they were threatened by other men (romantic rivals in both cases) and each made the decision to call the police rather than risk the consequences of an altercation. Withdrawing from conflict in this way can pose a challenge to the way these men view their own masculinity, especially if they get “punked out” in front of a woman. Yet both Jesse and Alvaro weighed the consequences against the gains and made the choice to avoid further trouble. As Jesse put it, “it’s okay that the other guy won, because [I’m] still sober and nobody got hurt and nobody got in trouble.”

But not all probationers appreciate the ways in which their behavior and lifestyles are affected by probation. Several men described in their interviews feeling a sense of near-paranoia as if they were constantly afraid of getting caught doing something wrong. Steve describes this feeling in the following excerpt from his interview.

Rebecca: What has it been like being on probation aside from having to come to the groups?

Steve: Horrible. Horrible, I hate it.

Rebecca: In what ways?

Steve: I just hate having to answer to somebody.

Rebecca: What are the kinds of things that really get to you the most? Things that you have to answer =

Steve: Things that you think that you’re not doing wrong and you’re on probation like just normal things in everyday life.

Rebecca: Mm-hmm. Like what?

Steve: You’ll think about everything you do wrong. Every single thing.

Rebecca: Mm-hmm.

Steve: Just anything. Speeding, going through a light or you know yelling at somebody a certain way or just every little thing.

Rebecca: So you feel like you could always get in trouble for something?

Steve: Of course.

## **Lack of Clarity**

An issue that arose repeatedly both in group and in the probationers' interviews was their lack of clarity and understanding about the process of moving from POP to the clinical group to completion. Though counselors and POs seem to believe that the process is transparent and the expectations of probationers are made clear, many of the probationers disagree. As discussed earlier, probationers in POG are often particularly unclear about what is expected of them and I observed a few expressing their confusion about the 52 week policy; that is, some claim that they had been led to believe that they needed to complete one year of group and they were finished. The fact that holidays, cancelled sessions, and their absences would not count toward those 52 weeks seemed to be new information to several of them. Further, that their completion of group was at the full discretion of their PO and the DV unit supervisor was not something that all of the probationers understood. The following excerpt from an interview with Al, a probationer in POG, demonstrates this point.

Rebecca: Do you know what is expected of you in terms of moving through the group and making progress?

Al: No.

Rebecca: Is that a problem?

Al: No.

Rebecca: So you'll just kind of go with the flow?

Al: I go with it. Yes. To see what's next. The next step and how it goes.

Rebecca: Okay. And how long do you expect that it will take you to get through? To finish the group?

Al: I don't know. They say 52 weeks.

Rebecca: Mm-hmm. Well, it's at least 52 weeks.

Al: Oh.

Even a group member whose progress had won the approval of his counselors and POs felt uncertain about what exactly was required of him in order to complete the group and how the decisions about his completion was made.

“But you know, when [am I] going to get out of the class? I know it's a 52 week minimum, but [sometimes I think] ‘wow’. I mean, they even told me, I think it was about a month or so ago, to fill out the questions on the paper, bring it in the class, we'll discuss it. And then we'll consider you for completing the class. I filled out the paper, I came to class, I went over the paper. Here we are two months later and I'm still in the class. Now let's see what happens tonight,



because last time I asked John, ‘John what’s going on?’ And he said now it’s up to my probation officer.” -Jesse

This can be very discouraging for probationers who have worked hard to complete their probation requirements, participate actively in group, and make lifestyle and behavioral changes that demonstrate their commitment to a non-abusive future.

Perhaps of even more concern is the lack of clarity on these issues shown by staff. The following example taken from field notes, though atypical, indicates that staff members are not always sure themselves about the procedures for a probationer’s completion of group. This excerpt of field notes illustrates this point.

Jesse said that he was frustrated and that he wanted to tell the group that he was upset. He explained his situation about how he was on probation earlier, had done 48 weeks, violated and then had to go back (and start over). And then he said that he was upset about all the confusion and he feels like he doesn’t really understand what it’s going take for him to get off probation. And he said, ‘Who is it who determines when I’m done with this group?’ Jesse said to (his PO), ‘I was told that it was up to you, that it was my probation officer’s decision’. And the counselor said to the PO, ‘Yeah, I believe it is up to you.’ And the PO said, ‘Well, I didn’t know it was up to me.’ She looked a little uncomfortable and said, ‘I didn’t know that, I thought it was a decision that VIBS was making.’ And she said, ‘Well, we’ll talk about it afterwards.’

It is important to stress here that, for the most part, I observed counselors and POs to be knowledgeable, consistent, and unified in their representation of probation policy and procedure. The above example is, as I state, atypical. However, I believe that the potential for this type of confusion warrants mentioning.

### **Counselor Turnover**

In addition to the sense of feeling stifled in group and the lack of clarity about procedures, probationers mentioned the high turnover of counselors as a significant problem. Probationers who had been in the group for several months mentioned having worked with three or four group counselors during that time. Whereas the probationers had positive things to say about most of those counselors, they felt that when a new counselor enters the group, it is almost as if one has to “start over”, repeating his story several more times for a counselor who is unfamiliar with it. This starting over was

frustrating to the probationers who already felt that group was overly repetitious and seemed to “go nowhere” each week. And to the probationers who were more experienced in group, starting over meant that the progress the probationer had demonstrated to the former counselor was wasted and he must now prove himself all over again with a new counselor. There was the perception that counselor turnover slowed down a probationer’s progress toward completion of the group and this was disheartening to some.

### **Positive Responses**

Of the 18 probationers I interviewed, about half had primarily positive things to say about their experiences in group. The following are the aspects of group that these probationers most appreciated and found helpful.

- **The knowledge, expertise, and personal qualities of the group facilitators-** Many probationers were impressed with the POs and counselors’ knowledge about domestic violence and their ability to challenge and confront the probationers. A few of the probationers described the counselors as presenting some of the more theoretical perspectives on domestic violence while the POs helped to break down that information in a way that the probationers could easily understand and apply to their own situations. Also mentioned was the fact that the POs and counselors were down-to-earth and easy to talk to while, at the same time, professional with no compunction about challenging inappropriate behavior and setting firm boundaries.
- **The opportunity to vent and discuss one’s problems-** Probationers expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to talk about one’s frustrations and express themselves in a safe environment. Several also described how much they get from listening to the stories of their fellow group members and the sense of mutual benefit they receive from that exchange.
- **Learning new skills and information-** A topic that arose frequently in interviews with the probationers was the acquisition of new skills, particularly anger management skills. Many described having learned to identify their

triggers—the particular things that set them off and make them most angry, how to de-escalate a potentially explosive situation, and how to talk through problems rather than reacting angrily as a first response. Frequently in interviews, probationers discussed the different types of abuse they have learned to recognize. Most said that, aside from physical assault, they knew little or nothing about other behaviors were considered abusive or controlling. Several also said that, prior to learning about it in group, they failed to realize the effects of partner abuse on children, especially when the children are not actually present to witness abusive acts.

## CHAPTER 6 Telling the Story: the Role of Narrative

“You get your guys who are like me who just, you know, tell their story. Tell it exactly how it happened and they tell the truth. Then you get the guys who just don’t want to own up to it... They just, no matter how long they’re there, the probation officer in the (group) still has to open up the folder and go ‘ This is what you’re convicted of. Admit it already’. They try to twist it around and make it so it’s still the other person’s fault. When I’m asked to tell my story, I tell it just like I told it (to you), word for word and that’s it. This is what happened. It’s not what she did, it’s what I did.” -Jesse, probationer and batterer intervention program completer

Of all the activities that take place in a typical group session, perhaps the most significant is *telling the story*. From a probationer’s first session, he is repeatedly instructed by facilitators to tell the group why he is there. Often this happens when someone new is brought into the group and each member is expected to introduce himself; it is a sort of group welcoming or initiation ritual. Every probationer, including the new member, must make a statement about the crime he committed. Telling the story also happens during the course of a session when a facilitator focuses in on an individual probationer and questions him about some aspect of his domestic violence history, what some probationers have referred to as being in “the hot seat”. In this context, the tone of the interaction between the probationer and the facilitator is often confrontational and a probationer who produces a story which is not consistent with group expectations (discussed below) is challenged on both the facts of his story and on the attitudes and beliefs behind it. Finally, in this study, telling the story happened in interviews when I asked the probationers to do just that. The stories the probationers told me contained much more detail than the abbreviated versions that were typically recounted in group and, as I had hoped, revealed more about the probationers’ actual perceptions of their crimes, their probation sentences, and the experience of participating in group. Throughout data collection and analysis, the concept of *the story* presented itself over and over again as a significant aspect of the DV unit probationer’s experience and as a functional element of the intervention. Narrative theory, a broad term for the collective interdisciplinary theories about the meaning and significance of narratives, has proved useful in examining why the story plays such a large role in the probation context. The

narratives themselves as produced by the probationers can be better understood when looked at through the lens of impression management. The next section discusses these theories and their relationships to probationers' narratives.

### ***Theories of Narrative and Self-Presentation***

Baumeister and Newman (1994) theorize that individuals are inspired to tell particular stories by the need to make meaning of events. The authors break down this need into four categories of motivations. The first category of motivations they describe involves the need for *purposiveness and fulfillment*. The need for purposiveness would lead one to tell a story in which otherwise incongruous events are intentionally and causally linked so as to imbue them with purpose. In a story told for a sense of fulfillment, events might be described as bringing to reality a longtime wish or dream. Baumeister and Newman's second type of motive is for *justification and value*, in which the storyteller has a firm sense of right and wrong that can offer a basis for justifying one's actions, and the story that is told interprets events in a way that is consistent with the teller's values and standards. Such a story might shift responsibility away from oneself, alter the events or include explanations and motivations, distance the teller from a transgression, deny personal responsibility, or transform the transgressor into the victim. The third type of motivation creates stories intended to bring the teller a sense of *efficacy and control*; stories told with this motivation provide the narrator with the perception of the ability to make a difference and control the environment. Narratives in which control is maintained are likely to increase the teller's sense of efficacy. A story may also deny an individual's degree of control in a situation that ended in failure. Identifying elements of a past failure and knowing how to avoid such a failure in the future may also create in the narrator a sense of efficacy. Finally, we learn that stories are sometimes told to bolster *self-worth* or to defuse threats to it. These types of stories may contain themes related to success or overcoming personal or practical obstacles. The storyteller may judge his self-worth in reference to his own values or in comparison with individual or collective others. Each of these motives for narrative production speak to the storyteller's desire or need to represent him- or herself in a particular way to an audience, to him- or herself, or a combination of both. Narrative theory suggests that

storytellers create accounts which help to construct the teller's own understanding of events as well as to represent events to others in such a way as to reflect well on the teller. In this way, the creation of narrative is not a passive recount of the past, but an active construction of reality from the teller's perspective.

Goffman's theories (1959) suggest that narratives such as those described in this chapter serve as structured presentations of the self. When asked to tell the story of how they came to be on probation, the probationers are presenting versions of themselves—who they are, what they did, how they felt in the past and how they feel now—to a particular audience in narrative form. The motives and methods of managing the impressions of others are at work as the probationers construct their narratives.

Social identity refers to how one is defined and regarded in social interaction (Schlenker, 1980). The relationship between the presentation of self and identity is described well by Schlenker (1980) when he writes,

Identities are what people attempt to monitor and control in front of others. People's outcomes from interaction are shaped by how they are defined and regarded by others, so people try to control their identities in front of others to control these outcomes. This is the essence of self-presentation. Through many devices, people attempt to control the facts, constructs, and beliefs that others have about them. (p. 70)

For many of the probationers in this study, being arrested and cast as criminals were events that contradicted both their social and personal identities. This is what Schlenker (1980) describes as a predicament, which is “any situation in which events have undesirable implications for the identity-relevant images actors have claimed or desire to claim” (p. 125). In a predicament, an actor has some responsibility or association with an act or event perceived as bad or undesirable and the acts or events appear to contradict the actor's claim on a desirable identity. Both the actor's social identity and self identity may be in jeopardy in such a situation. Schlenker describes several impression management tactics that individuals employ to remediate an identity-threatening predicament. The two categories of remediating tactics are *accounts*, which are explanations the actor hopes will minimize the perceived severity of the predicament, and *apologies*, in which the actor admits to responsibility for the bad act but tries to

obtain a pardon or reduce the negative consequences to him- or herself. The narratives told by probationers in this study can be broken down into accounts of abusive behavior, apologies for abusive behavior, or some combination of the two. Whether or not the probationers' narratives are "true" representations of their feelings, attitudes, and beliefs is not at issue in this discussion; rather, this section examines the choices that probationers make in using these strategies when asked to account for their status as probationers. These concepts will be explored in greater depth as we further examine the types of narratives created by the probationers.

### ***Acceptable Narratives***

As mentioned earlier, all group members must tell the group what they have done that has brought them to the DV unit group. As simple a task as it might seem, telling the story of how one ended up on probation for a domestic violence crime is not easy for most of the probationers. Some experience it as admitting to a personal failure or a major character flaw and find it painful to expose themselves publicly, even among others who have committed similar crimes. Others resent having to describe events that they believe were exaggerated or fabricated by the victim or misconstrued by law enforcement. Over the course of time, some probationers have described coming to find the experience rewarding, even cathartic, as they come to terms with what they have done, whereas others grow increasingly resentful at having to repeat themselves and listen to others repeat themselves week after week.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of telling the story is that it must be told within parameters laid out by the group facilitators, according to a set of explicit rules. These rules of narrative are the same which governed the expression of emotions, the "feeling rules" discussed in chapter 3. Storytelling in this context is a type of performance which Goffman (1959) tells us is "'socialized' to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p. 25). Consistent with the goals of the intervention, probationers are expected to take accountability for their behavior and this accountability begins in group with a straightforward admission to the crime committed, told without justifications or excuses and without references to the victim's behavior. An introduction that would meet these criteria would sound

something like, “My name is Frank and I’m on probation because I threw a phone at my girlfriend and was verbally abusive to her.” An example of an unacceptable introduction would be, “I’m here because I made a phone call.” A probationer who describes his crime in that way probably broke an order of protection that made it illegal for him to have any contact with the victim. In such an instance, a facilitator would respond by saying something like, “Lots of people make phone calls and don’t get arrested. Why did you get arrested?” The facilitator prompts the probationer in this way until an acceptable admission is produced. Often, probationers’ introductions or admissions fall somewhere between a clear, straightforward description of the crime and a statement that completely avoids accountability. An example of such an admission would be, “I’m Jack. I’m here because my wife got an order of protection against me and I broke it by calling her.” This kind of statement, though containing the probationer’s admission to his crime, also begins with a reference to his wife’s behavior, a reference that would be construed by facilitators as implicating the victim in the crime and subsequent arrest. A facilitator might respond with a reminder that Jack should be focusing on what he did and not on what his wife did. Some probationers have difficulty recognizing such subtle distinctions and feel frustrated when their introductions are not perceived as “good enough”.

During a group session, either in the course of a discussion or as a way of introducing a particular discussion, the facilitators will ask to hear a particular probationer’s story (“the hot seat”). “Mr. Smith, will you tell the group again why you’re here?” a facilitator might say. This explanation is expected to include more details than an introduction and would provide the group with the larger context in which the incident and arrest in question took place. As the probationer recounts his version of the events that led to his arrest and probation sentence, facilitators listen carefully for breaches of the story rules and omissions or misrepresentations of facts. Should a probationer digress to discuss his victim’s behavior, a facilitator will typically attempt to redirect the story to focus on the probationer’s own behavior and ask questions that encourage him to think about his motivations for and perceptions of abusive behavior.

Group members who have attended for many months and who appear to have internalized the rules and purpose of the group will often take up the role of the facilitator



by confronting a more resistant member about his version of the story. Facilitators have described this as an important part of the group process, one that they actively encourage. In listening to newer group members tell their stories, more experienced members can practice detecting in others the indications of denial, misrepresentation of facts, and refusal to accept responsibility that they themselves are likely to have exhibited when they first entered the group. A more experienced member's interrogation of a newer member's story also provides the new member with feedback from a peer, rather than an authority figure, which may serve to break down the new member's resistance to group norms should he come to understand them as originating, not just from the authority figure, but from other members like him.

The following example comes from field notes that I took during a clinical group session in January 2007. It exemplifies a man who resists conforming to the narrative rules of the group.

Then finally after everyone went around (and told their stories), it was the new guy Les's turn to talk and his explanation of what had happened was much more reluctant. He was not really that willing to admit fault in the situation. He said that what happened was that he and his wife had an argument, she got hysterical, having a fit, kicking and screaming on the couch and he slapped her in the face. And Arlene (probation officer/facilitator) said, "Were you trying to help her?" She sort of said it with a laugh. And Les said, "Well, some people believe that if you slap a hysterical person it calms them down." Everyone got a little laugh at that. One of the guys next to him said, "Man, that only happens on TV". So the other guys listened to Les explain his situation and they really pushed on different issues like, why they were fighting in the first place, what had happened just prior to the fight, what kinds of abusive behaviors had he demonstrated before. And he really denied a lot of the fault. At one point, while he was describing the situation, he said that after he slapped his wife, for some period of time after that, maybe a month or a couple of months, she still remained sleeping in the same bed with him, which he said proved that she was not afraid of him. Vickie (counselor/facilitator) interrupted immediately and said, "Just because she slept in the bed with you doesn't mean that she wasn't afraid." Les said, "I don't agree with that, explain to me how that could be true." And Vickie and several of the other guys in the group did explain to him how that could be true. Maybe she was afraid of getting him upset again so she decided to sleep in the same bed to keep everything quiet and normal so he wouldn't get upset, different things like that. He sort of acknowledged that maybe she was afraid to leave him because she wasn't sure if she could stand on her own two feet by herself. He didn't

understand that she could have been afraid for her safety or that she might be afraid of what another argument would bring. Les said that he'd never been violent before, with his wife or really with anybody. He said it didn't seem fair to him that after ten years of marriage, he made one mistake, and his wife wouldn't forgive him. She wouldn't speak to him for a month or so after it happened and then she got a lawyer and started divorce proceedings. It seemed to me that he was confused and hurt and angry, although he didn't want to admit to that. Some of the guys explained to him that once you slap someone, once you physically abuse someone, that can change everything. All the ten years of marriage that went before that, everything is different once there's abuse like that. I couldn't really get a sense of whether or not Les bought into that. He did spend some time trying to explain what his wife had done. I guess most of their problems focused on money and her overspending. He mentioned that she had spent a lot of money on weight loss programs and had paid a lot on the credit cards, which he described as his credit cards because they were in his name, because apparently his wife had poor credit and couldn't get cards on her own. And then once she lost a lot of weight from these weight loss programs and looked great, she told him that she had to continue going to the weight loss programs as maintenance basically for the rest of her life. He was very upset about that. He said that there were times that they couldn't pay their mortgage and all their money was going to the Diet Center.

While Les was talking about his wife's behavior, Arlene really tried to refocus him onto his own behavior and explain that, your wife isn't here, she can't defend herself now, and that's not what this group is about, this group is about focusing on your own behavior and taking responsibility for your own behavior. And Les seemed to get that. One of the other group members asked if there were children in the house when (the slap) happened and what the possible effect on the children might have been. And Les said that his children were not home at the time and that he didn't think that it affected them because they weren't there and after that fight, because the wife wasn't speaking to him anymore, they weren't fighting and he thought that that was better for the children. And then the other guy brought up the fact that the children are always affected by abuse and he gave as an example the fact that his own son was the one who called the police on him when he was beating up the child's mother. And Arlene also said that tension, the silent treatment in the house, kids always notice that and that's not necessarily any better than fighting.

So after Les had talked for a while, then the guys really fired a lot of questions at him. As I said earlier, "What kinds of abusive behavior did you do?" Les just tried to defend himself, he had lots of explanations for why things had happened and he really wasn't owning up to his issues. After a lot of denial and sort of avoiding the questions about how the original fight came up, Vickie confronted Les very firmly and said, "You are here to talk about what you did. The other group members here were honest with you about the things that they did and now

it's your turn to present the argument that you had with your wife as it really happened." Still Les maintained that that was what happened. The way he left it was that his wife was having a hysterical fit and he had to slap her. He wouldn't say if he said anything to her. He said that his wife called him a fucking asshole and that they never use that kind of language in his house and things like that. One of the guys said do you ever curse at your wife, and Les said no, I never curse. One of guys asked him, "What do you do when you get angry?" He said, "I don't get angry at people." The guys confronted him on that, saying, "Obviously you were angry at your wife because you slapped her." So after this went on for a while...Les was fairly clueless in my opinion, but he didn't get too flustered. He seems fairly sure of himself. He was able to acknowledge a few things and he wasn't completely argumentative, he wasn't angry that he was being confronted, he seemed able to take it for what it was. After a while, Arlene said, "Okay this is your first day, we'll give you a break." She said that this is early in the process and it was a good reminder for everyone else to see where it is that men start off in this group. She kind of left it at that but I got the sense that everybody knew what she meant.

In this example, Les violates the basic group norms of telling the story. First, he places blame on his wife by describing her "hysteria", excessive spending habits, and use of foul language. Second, Les attempts to deny any abusive motivations by implying that he had no choice but to slap his wife as a way of helping her to calm down. And third, he casts himself in the role of the victim by asserting that he should be forgiven by his wife for making one mistake in ten years of marriage. On each of these counts, Les and his story are challenged.

The practice of prompting the probationer to examine his narrative is consistent with the psychotherapeutic practice of narrative therapy. From this perspective, personal narratives are seen as helping to reveal psychological issues and problems and are used to help an individual come to solutions to those problems. The process of "deconstructing" narratives is the crux of narrative therapy and involves "disassembling the discourses, assumptions, and overarching sociocultural narratives that underpin the clients' stories" (Herman, D., Jahn, M., & Ryan, M. L., 2005, p.376). A crucial difference, however, between what takes place in narrative therapy and what happens in this (and most) batterer's groups is that narrative therapy is carried out in the context of an extremely collaborative and supportive therapist-client relationship rather than in a setting in which direct confrontation is the *modus operandi*.

Gubrium and Holstein (1998) describe the practice of storytelling as “actively constructive and locally constrained” (p. 164). This is a helpful lens through which to view the probationers’ narratives in the group context. Their stories are actively constructive in that they are told and retold at a particular time for any number of motivations: to convince or cajole, to defend or justify, to make sense of events or to alleviate discomfort. The local constraint that is placed on these narratives by group facilitators and often other group members clearly has a tremendous influence on how a probationer tells his story. Gubrium and Holstein also refer to this local constraint as the *narrative auspices* under which a story is told; narrative auspices are influential audiences of the people processing and regulating institutions that “elicit, screen, fashion, and variously highlight personal narratives” (p. 164). Institutional arrangements, like job interviews, court proceedings, or, in this case, a probation group, influence how stories are constructed. Gubrium and Holstein (1998) term the influence of an institutional narrative setting as *formal narrative control*. Narrative theories suggest that the probationer is likely to have created an explanatory narrative about the experiences leading up to his entry into the group—that is, his arrest, his victim’s behavior, his interaction with police and the courts, etc. Once he enters POG and is instructed in the acceptable narratives of the group, his own narrative (representative of his identity) is likely to be threatened. The ways in which various probationers responded to this threat are discussed later in this chapter.

### ***Change in Narrative***

Telling the story in group functions not only as an opportunity for facilitators and group members to break down the denial and resistance in some probationers, but is also used as a marker of an individual’s progress. Facilitators make clear to the probationers that the way the men tell their stories, how much resistance they show in group, and their degree of participation in discussions will determine how long it takes them to complete the intervention. One PO’s note in a probationer’s case file read, “Subject (probationer) wants to blame wife, her boyfriend, and his first lawyer for his problems. Told him he will be in group a long time if he continues to deny.” This statement perfectly represents the message that probationers receive from POs and counselors throughout their group

participation; essentially, they must comply—at least verbally—with expectations or they will not progress. Both probationers and group facilitators have described how stories change and evolve as probationers spend more time in group, listen to the stories of others, and are confronted on their own stories' failure to meet group expectations. Typically, the probationers' narratives begin with the markers of resistance and denial—victim-blaming, refusal to acknowledge abuse, etc.—and, for some, evolve into more accurate accounts of abusive events and motives. The week after the session described above, I observed in group the following discussion about Les:

Vickie asked who was missing and a couple of the probationers at the same time said that the new guy (Les) is (in the hall) talking to Officer Fusco. They then made a few comments about Les and chuckled a little bit about how he was in such denial and how they really needed to call them on his stuff. They seem to get sort of a kick out of it. I think it made them feel good to be able to be in that position of a little bit of authority over new guy who they looked at as being really naïve. Vickie pushed them on it a little bit and asked, "How did you guys feel when you first came into group?" Most of them said "we felt the same way, we were in denial, we wouldn't take responsibility for anything, we blamed everything on our wives or girlfriends."

The interaction that took place between the counselor Vickie and several of the group members in this example suggest a sense of pride in the probationers who are able to look upon Les's denial with a certain knowingness and recognition of their former, less evolved or enlightened selves. Vickie hears the group members tone of superiority and amusement as they discuss Les's naïveté and redirects them toward an assessment of their own progress. When comparing themselves to Les (who has become a sort of scapegoat for their self-satisfaction), the more experienced group members are quick to recognize that they were once just like him. One probationer who had been attending the group for several months at the time of his interview told me,

"When I first started...I didn't like to admit. I was more of like um, I would say something like 'I was accused of', or 'I plead guilty to such and such'. No 'committing', (no) 'hitting my kids mother,' whatever. Now I don't mind doing it. I feel like if I don't tell 'em, if I don't be honest with them, I don't be honest with myself. You know, cheating them. And I told a couple of guys, you heard me tell a couple of guys, 'you're cheating yourself, your cheating us too'. You gotta be honest. When I first started I wasn't honest. I was still in denial." -James

As mentioned above, facilitators also use the evolution (or lack thereof) of the probationer's narrative to assess his progress. One PO describes it this way:

“(We are) always keeping a focus with guys like that, just to remind them, like I’ll ask them, you know ‘why are you here again?’ just to hear the story and see how it changes. That’s another thing that we, that I use a lot, even when they’re done with the group...(I’ll say) ‘why are you here again?’ just to see what they’ll say. If they’re trying to get me to kind of agree that it wasn’t really their fault, or if they’ve accepted some kind of accountability and responsibility for it. That’s a prediction I use... what their story is..throughout the course of the group, how it changes. –Officer Renee Stewart

### ***The Relationship Narrative***

From the observation and interview data I collected, there emerged four different narrative themes. Les's story (recounted above) fits the theme I call the relationship narrative. In the relationship narrative, the story of how one came to be on probation for domestic violence begins not with an act of abuse, but with the ending of a relationship. As these probationers tell their stories, all events—verbal aggression, victimization, issuance of protective orders, arrest—followed from the break-up of a significant, long-term partner relationship. While the story Les told in group began with a particular incident (his slapping his wife), the narrative he provided during his interview with me revealed that he views his current situation as stemming, not from the slap, but from his wife's desire to end the marriage. A mild mannered professional man in his mid-forties, Les believes himself to be out of place in the DV group and describes himself as lacking assertiveness in relationships. Several months after he slapped his wife, she obtained a stay-away order of protection against him that meant that he could not have any contact at all with her. Les broke that order of protection three times. As he tells it, he did so to try to save his marriage.

Vinnie's narrative is another example of a story that focuses on the end of the relationship. A recently divorced white man in his early forties, Vinnie represented himself in his interview with me as a true “family man” who loves spending time with his two young kids, playing in the yard, and having family barbeques. Like Les, Vinnie's wife desired an end to the marriage, a turn of events which Vinnie found difficult to

understand or accept. He reports that his ex-wife made up stories of Vinnie's threatening behavior so as to obtain an order of protection against him and begin the process of ending the marriage. Again like Les, Vinnie violated the order three times and is now on probation for criminal contempt. He feels that he has been victimized by his wife and by the criminal justice system. His lack of compliance with certain conditions of his probation sentence has impacted on Vinnie's legal right to see his children. He was permitted visitation only under the supervision of a court-approved adult. Believing that the system is biased against him, Vinnie has refused to see his children under these circumstances, stating that he should not have to be supervised in order to interact with his own children. As of the time when these data were collected, the court had imposed therapeutic visitation conditions for Vinnie and his children, meaning that he could only visit them under the supervision of a trained therapist. He had not agreed to that arrangement and had not seen his children in some time. In group, Vinnie says little and participates only when called upon to do so. After observing his behavior in group, I was surprised to learn the extent of his resistance to the group intervention and the anger and resentment he revealed in his interview.

Sal is a man in his sixties who was on probation for threatening acts against his ex-wife and his son in separate events. At the time of data collection, Sal was the probationer who had been attending group the longest: more than 90 weeks. His narrative begins with his divorce, at which time he says that his wife told lies in order to obtain an order of. He broke his OP twice while trying to obtain personal belongings from the home he formerly shared with his wife and was arrested while on probation after slashing his son's tires and shooting a "warning shot" into the air with a shotgun. Sal firmly insists that he is not abusive and does not have a problem with anger, as his fellow probationers do. He believes himself to be a victim of both his wife and a biased criminal justice system. After almost 100 weeks of group attendance, probation and VIBS staff decided that there was no more that Sal could learn from the group and he was discharged as a successful completion. Sal's case represents a major exception to the rule of accountability as a measure of success.

Steve is a Latino man in his late 20s and was arrested for violating an order of protection taken against him by the mother of his child. In his interview and on at least one occasion in group, he said that he violated the OP by calling his victim. However, when confronted about his story by his probation officer in group, he admitted to holding a pillow over his ex-girlfriend's face during a fight "to keep her quiet". Like the other relationship narratives, in Steve's story he blames his arrest and probation sentence on his ex-girlfriend who left him and took his daughter away with no warning. Steve suffers from depression and describes being angry with those around him most of the time. He thinks that his probation sentence is unreasonably harsh and he feels a constant need to look over his shoulder to make sure that he is not getting in further trouble with the law. Though he shows up regularly as required, Steve believes that the DV group is a waste of time and that most of what the other probationers say in group is lies.

A white European immigrant in his fifties, Pat is another example of a probationer who attributes his current troubles to his ex-wife's actions to end their relationship. He was arrested for—and fully admits to—pushing his wife. Pat reports that he is still getting over the loss of his relationship with his wife, though he is angry with her and believes that she used the criminal justice system against him to get her out of the marriage. He is particularly resistant to the group intervention, believes it is a waste of time, and states it prevents him from moving on with his life. Pat was in POG at the time of the interview and he was one of the most outspoken members of the group.

The elements of the relationship narrative are accounts, by Schlenker's definition, which serve to minimize the severity of a perceived undesirable act or event. Finding themselves in the predicament of having to explain why they are on probation, the probationers who tell the relationship narrative employ various types of accounts to try to remediate the situation. By denying responsibility for their abusive behavior (or by denying that such behavior ever took place), these probationers attempt to preserve their identities as non-abusive men and create identities in which they are victims of "relationships gone wrong". What follows are the aspects common to the relationship narratives of the probationers described above.



1. In most of these narratives, the probationer's wives or partners are described as having left the relationship suddenly without warning or sufficient reason. The following quotations from interviews with probationers illustrate this theme.

“My wife decided she didn't want to be married. Uh, my wife come back from upstate for the weekend and started moving stuff out of our bedroom and into my daughter's room. I said what are you doing, she goes well I'm not talking to you, not cooking for you, not sleeping with you, uh not doing your laundry. I said why? No answer. She has never given me an answer. I have asked my kids over the years, find out what happened. And uh, she has, she just shakes her head.” - Pat

“ She uh, picked me up from work and then she took me home gave me a kiss goodbye said I'll see you later. I went downstairs and everything was gone...She took all her stuff and moved out with my daughter. So, I flipped out. I called her. I yelled at her, I called her names, threatened her, and the next day I had detectives at my house. And they arrested me, locked me up.” -Steve

By representing the breakup of the relationship as having happened suddenly and without warning, these probationers begin their narratives from a position of innocence, almost as if they were helpless bystanders in their own lives. Had there been warning signs, their stories seem to suggest, they might have been able to do something to keep the relationship together. But they perceive their partners as having taken away the power to control their relationships.

The quotes below illustrate how the probationers, from the present vantage point, look back on their partner's actions as having had a secret purpose—to end the relationship—all along.

“I just felt she was using that as her ticket out of the marriage. She needed something conclusive to get out of the marriage...So, um, her mind was made up a long time ago, even before that slap.” -Les

“There was nobody (else in my life). She was making up (that I was cheating on her). Changing everything around. I say to everybody that this was her that was doing it. This was her that was probably cheating on me. Changing the thing around. She wanted out of the marriage. She didn't know how to do it. Let me put all this shit on him.” -Vinnie

In telling the story in this way, the probationers represent the end of the relationships as having been predetermined, further removing them from responsibility.

Their partners' of abuse were not in response to the men's behavior, but rather were used as a way to exit the marriage. In denying responsibility for the events that lead to their probation sentence, these probationers are using what Schlenker calls a *defense of innocence*.

Particularly for Les and Vinnie, two men for whom the identity of "family man" seems especially central, this narrative may be useful in helping them to preserve their identities. When social events are inconsistent with one's expectations and understanding, the creation of narrative can help an individual make sense of the situation. For these two men, the end of family life as they knew it and the fact that they themselves were responsible for this end might have been so disruptive to their world- and self-views, that extraordinary explanations needed to be constructed. Les and Vinnie have created narratives in which the partners' unhappiness came first and the allegations of abuse were tools to facilitate the breakup. Their narratives do not include acknowledgement that their own behavior might have in some way led to the breakup of the relationship, as the group rules dictate. The way in which Les and Vinnie each made meaning of difficult-to-accept events in their lives corresponds with Baumeister and Newman's (1994) narrative motive of creating purpose. For Les and Vinnie, what they have experienced makes sense only in the context of their wives' purposeful actions to end their marriages. This enables Les and Vinnie to each occupy the role of the victim in their narratives while renouncing responsibility and blaming their troubles on factors external to themselves.

2. The seeming senselessness of these events has left these probationers feeling abandonment, loss, and hurt. Their efforts to reclaim the relationships or obtain from their partners some acknowledgment of the past relationship are thwarted by their partners' refusals and/or the enforcement of an order of protection which prevents the probationer from contacting his partner.

"My wife had a plaque made. Stars (on it).. 'you are my dream come true, thirty years of marriage'. She had it engraved and all. I brought to the court and my, and the lawyer says, 'Did you give your husband a plaque saying you are my wish

come true on your thirtieth anniversary?’ She says ‘What’re you kidding?’, that’s what she said. We had it. Didn’t mean anything.” -Sal

“And me, you know, I love my kids, I love my wife, love my family. Um, we had our ups and downs. We had our situations. There were faults on both parts. But uh, I um, I didn’t take it too well.” –Vinnie

“...It wasn’t so much that I lost my wife, I lost my best friend. That’s what hurt me more.” –Pat

“But um, I broke the order of protection and the reason I broke the order of protection is because that was the only chance I could talk to my wife because I still love her. And I wanted to keep our marriage alive.” –Les

In referencing the connection that they used to have with their partners, the relationship narrative tells the story of the end of romantic love. Lost love is a narrative theme that has been a ,mainstay of literature, film, and other narrative media for as long as the media have existed. Because it is so familiar and so powerful, the probationers may include it in their narratives so as to place themselves in sympathetic positions, both for themselves and for the audience (in this case, the interviewer). The character of the broken-hearted lover is the antithesis of the abusive controlling male, the character into which these men have been cast as probationers. These men are not the bad guys, their stories tell us, but sympathetic protagonists.

This type of account would be described by Schlenker (1980) as a *justification through higher goals*. By embedding a bad act in a broader set of admirable values (love for one’s partner) and goals (preserving the relationship), the relationship narrative justifies acts such as violating an order of protection and suggests that the act served a greater purpose. This type of justification attempts to place both the bad act and the actor in a more favorable light.

3. The probationer minimizes and normalizes his crime and believes that his punishment is too harsh.

“I screwed up one time and I’ve, I you know I just, three years probation is going to cost me a hundred dollars a month for three years plus this weekly fee plus another one, you know. Uh, fine me \$ 3,000.00 and let’s move on.” -Pat

“Do I think it was a crime? Of course it was a terrible thing to do. But you know does the punishment fit the crime? No. Not at all. You know, I’m not saying

OK, it's his first offense you know, give him a slap on the wrist. But you know three years probation. And uh, the alcohol tests and stuff you know. It's another form of getting money, ching, ching. I got to pay, like I told you, a hundred bucks a month on probation." -Pat

The literature on batterers documents their use of minimization and denial when asked about their abusive behavior (Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005; Smith, 2007). From a narrative psychology perspective, minimizing the harmful impact of one's behavior might be viewed as motivated by the need to bolster or maintain one's sense of self-worth (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Perhaps with the exception of Steve, who has had some run-ins with the law prior to his domestic violence sentence, all of the probationers who tell this narrative consider themselves law-abiding, non-aggressive men. Their presence in the criminal justice system for domestic violence challenges that self-perception. Yet to accept one's identity as a criminal, especially one who has victimized his family, is likely to be too painful and damaging to one's self-image. Minimizing the impact of their behavior can perhaps help them to stave off the identity of criminal and maintain their sense of self-worth.

Some of these probationers make reference to what they consider to be more severe crimes of domestic violence, particularly those involving physical abuse, and compare them to their own acts.

"There was no uh, not to say what I have heard in the group but just an example um, you know I never punched my ex-wife, I never tried to smother her, I never tried to, you know, there was no, when I hear what, you know you look up the definition of domestic violence you know it's just, to me it's so much more, it's intense. Domestic violence... There's verbal abuse, mental abuse, but they're in categories. They're in, there isn't, I'm, I'm caught up in this thing with everybody else and there was no, there was no domestic violence." -Vinnie

"I think that people that physically abuse somebody should be in here. You know. I mean they really have a problem. I mean maybe I have a verbal problem but I didn't really hurt anybody. You know, and I know I didn't hurt her feelings, so. You know? I just think that sometimes the women use this against you know people like us, like me." -Steve

"What did I do, did I kill somebody? I mean tell me what I did. There was no medical report, there was no nothing. What did I, what, how did we, what do we do about this? I'm in the system." -Sal

Similarly, the relationship narrative includes statements intended to normalize the presence of violence and/or aggression in relationships. The probationers who this narrative expressed that they feel that they are just “average” or even “nice guys” and, if they are considered abusive, then anyone in a relationship should be considered so as well.

“Um, I don’t know how many marriages out there where one of the spouses doesn’t hit the other one in, in like say a 50 year marriage.” -Les

“They give you (a sheet of paper) with all different uh, forms of abuse. And uh, if you were to give this sheet to any girl uh, in a pre-marriage class, their fiancés abusive in some form or another. Not so much, uh physical but you know verbal. Uh, you know there would be no more marriages. I mean it’s impossible not to you know be guilty of half of the sheet. That’s my opinion.” -Pat

“People, (if) somebody does something wrong to you, you’re gonna get mad at ‘em. Right? ... Yeah, so. It’s just...it’s a part of life. I mean, you should have everybody in the world in this group... Because pretty much everybody in the world does everything that they say that we do in there. So, I mean, it’s, you know. I guess it’s just a matter if you get caught or not.” -Steve

Absent from this part of the relationship narrative is acknowledgement that though abuse is commonly found among couples, it can nevertheless have harmful effects. This narrative seems to suggest that the perceived ubiquity of relationship violence should make it a less serious crime. This type of account is called a *justification by comparison* (Schlenker, 1980). By comparing one’s own actions to the same or worse actions of others who go unpunished, the actor attempts to make his offense less severe and harmful.

4. These probationers feel victimized by former partner and/or by the criminal justice system. They believe that the criminal justice system is biased against men and is designed to bring in money to the government.

“But I’m not a criminal. I don’t feel that...I’m afraid of if there is a decent woman out there that, that is meant for me it’s sad because I couldn’t, I couldn’t give her the chance because through this whole experience I don’t know if I want to, I don’t know if I want to ever get married again or I’m afraid of dating. ...I’m afraid of the whole thing because I don’t trust, I put my trust in her. We had children. And once, once you go through what I’ve been through with the

deceiving and the lies and all that stuff. And taking me out of my home..." - Vinnie

"You know, she just fucked with me. I guess...And I got fucked. Basically. I mean nobody; you say that to your probation officer and she flies off the handle... I don't say nothing. What am I gonna say? I'm going to argue with her? There's no arguing, you're not gonna win, you're gonna lose." -Steve

"So uh, she got an order of protection and I don't know - that's another farce, I don't think, I think it's too simple to get an order of protection in Suffolk County." -Les

"I, I feel in my situation anybody at any time and, and the majority of them are, are, again women that can go out there and, and, and lean on the system, lean on the court system... And whether you did something or not they can go down there and, and say well on this certain, certain dates I got a police report.." -Vinnie

"That's how I feel that, that, that, yeah. You have no rights you know. If I would have gone, if a man has gone to get an order of protection against a woman it's almost like, what? What did she do to ya? Are you serious? Come on, come on. Know what I'm saying?" -Vinnie

"There's a guy in there who spoke up, he said uh, he's dealt with a woman DA, a woman judge. Uh, everything's been women. You know this is personal thing for women you know. You know you're uh accused of battering, uh one of their sex you know. You're guilty." -Pat

"It's another form of getting money, ching, ching. I got to pay, like I told you a hundred bucks a month on probation." -Pat

"A woman can go in and say anything she wants. Anything she wants and get an order of protection." -Sal

In blaming the criminal justice system and their partners for their present circumstance, the probationers attempt to preserve their desired identities. They attempt to divert attention away from themselves with excuses for why they are on probation.

This narrative also includes probationers' complaints about the hardships they endure while on probation, including the financial cost, limited freedom to travel, and constant fear of getting in trouble with the law and going to jail.

“The \$ 35.00 dollars a week which is probably a good price for, this type of thing is, is still over every week and it adds up plus I have to pay my probation officer every month, which I haven’t, quite honestly haven’t been doing. That I don’t even understand because how they’d expect you to pay for all this stuff, support yourself and pay child support is beyond me. I don’t think it’s fair that way.” – Les

“This is a hassle you know. It’s hard when you have a job. The job that I have you don’t get off at a certain time. So I have to be the one that asks, you know I gotta be off ...and I don’t even want to tell them why...The last job I was at I got fired because of all the classes. And I was making close to \$90,000 a year. So it ruins your life.” -Steve

“They took away my guns. I was a collector. I was a hunter. I can never go hunting with my grandson. I, I have to ask to leave Long Island. You know my whole life has been disrupted.” –Sal

When Steve says, “it ruins your life” and Sal similarly states that his “whole life has been disrupted” it is clear that, as they perceive it, the cause of this ruin was not their own behavior, but probation and the criminal justice system more generally.

### **Discussion of Relationship Narrative**

When examined together, the relationship narratives told by group members follow a similar course. It begins with the break-up of the relationship, which usually leads to feelings of anger, hurt, and frustration with the partner’s unwillingness to reconcile or at least behave in ways the man feels are reasonable. The man feels that he is being victimized by his partner which leads him to feel provoked and act out with abusive behavior. Most often this means violating the order of protection the partner has obtained to keep the man away. Consequences—most obviously arrest and probation sentence—follow. Feeling even more victimized by his partner and now by the criminal justice system, the man engages in denial, victim-blaming, and minimization. In group, he is confronted on these beliefs both by facilitators and other group members. He is then at a crossroads: he either acquiesces to group pressure and adopts the language of reform, displaying a “pseudo-acceptance” of group norms which dictate that he demonstrate accountability (as Vinnie does); he resists group pressure despite the

consequences and maintains that he committed no abuse and/or is being unfairly punished (as Sal and Pat do); or he sincerely comes to see himself as abusive, attempts to form a new non-abusive identity from this insight, and is “reformed” (as did some of the probationers discussed in the next sections).

### ***The Reform Narrative***

The probationers who report a change in attitude from victim-blaming and denial to acceptance of responsibility told similar narratives both in group and in interviews. Contained in these narratives are references to a former self who was ignorant and lacked insight into his behavior, which is contrasted with a more enlightened self who is motivated to maintaining a new, non-abusive identity.

James is a 30 year old African American man who had been attending the group for approximately a year and a half at the time of his interview. He was arrested for violating a stay-away order of protection after choking and holding a pillow over the face of his live-in girlfriend of several years. Over a period of about five years, James had been arrested several times for domestic violence against his girlfriend and had several DWI charges on his record as well. Before beginning his current probation sentence, he spent 90 days in the Suffolk County Jail for both DWI and domestic violence charges. James’s relationship with his victim ended at the time of his arrest in 2005. However, because they have two children together, one of whom is an eight year old seriously disabled by cerebral palsy, they have ongoing contact which is civil, according to James’s description. James reports that when he first began attending group, he did not feel that he belonged in the group. He refused to admit to the abuses that he had committed and he resented the restrictions that probation placed upon his life. After missing several sessions, James was called in to meet with the DV unit supervisor and was told that he was at risk of violating his probation with his spotty attendance. James then began attending more regularly and after listening to the stories his fellow probationers told over the course of several months, James said that he knew that he “wasn’t alone”; he realized that other group members had behaved just as he had. It wasn’t until James began a relationship with a new woman that he felt he must start being honest with himself and with others—especially his new girlfriend—about what he had done.



James's relationship continued and, after learning to identify the things that trigger his anger and gaining strategies for managing it, he now considers himself a nonabusive person. James was one of the most active and vocal members of his group.

Matt is a 23 year old Latino man on probation for grabbing his girlfriend by the throat and pushing her into a wall during an argument. He describes having been abusive in all of his past relationships with women but not realizing at the time that what he was doing was wrong. Matt now recognizes that the verbal and physical abuse that he committed were his attempts to control his partners. He says that he began to see himself in this way after just a week or two in group when he began recognizing his own abusive behavior in the stories of his fellow group members. Like James, Matt is now in another relationship which he describes as healthy and happy and he hopes never to return to the aggressive behavior of his past.

Paul, an Italian-American man in his mid-50s, has a long history of serious substance abuse problems, crime, and aggressive behavior. His arrest came after he threw his then-wife's computer across the room. According to his own account and those of probation officers and counselors, Paul spent many months in group denying his crimes and acting out angrily against group facilitators. Eventually, he says, he decided it was useless to argue and began listening in group. Though he denies some of the charges his ex-wife has leveled against him, Paul now admits to being verbally, psychologically, and financially abusive of her throughout the course of their relationship. Like Matt, Paul explained that he never in his life thought of anything other than physical violence as abusive but now realizes the effects that nonphysical abuse have as well. In his interview, he said that he wished he had learned as a teenager the things that he has learned in his group. Paul still struggles with his anger but now works hard to control his behavior and recognizes that that effort must continue if he is to remain nonviolent and complete his probation sentence without incident.

Craig is a white man of 29 years old who is on probation for violating an order of protection. According to his story, he had never physically abuse his girlfriend, though she claimed he had and obtained the order of protection based on lies she told. What makes Craig different, however, from other probationers who deny their victims' charges

is that he has come to recognize that he had been emotionally abusive in his relationship. The concept that has had the most impact upon Craig is that, regardless of how much one is provoked, it is still his choice to commit an abusive act. Craig's ex-girlfriend has repeatedly attempted to get back together since Craig's arrest but, despite missing her deeply and still caring for her, he has decided not to return to the relationship. He reports that he appreciates the opportunity to talk about his experiences and his feelings in group and to learn from the other group members. Craig feels that, though he is still wary about getting involved in another relationship, he has stronger relationship skills now than he did before beginning the group.

Jesse, a white man in his early thirties, completed the group two weeks after his interview. He was charged with harassment after what the district attorney described as a "head-to-toe beating" of his girlfriend. Jesse has a long substance abuse history and on the night of the incident had been drinking excessively, snorting cocaine, and smoking crack. He spent four months of a six month sentence in the Suffolk County Jail on a combination of charges including the harassment charge. During his time in jail, Jesse said that he was coming to realize that his abusive behavior was wrong and when he began attending group he began to see even more clearly that he had been verbally and psychologically abusive in several of his past relationships. Jesse also spent 14 months in an inpatient substance abuse facility and works hard on maintaining his sobriety and practicing the anger management skills he has learned in group, such as identifying triggers to anger and knowing when to walk away from a potentially explosive situation.

Twenty-one year old Drew is a white man who was sentenced to one year of interim probation on a menacing charge involving his fiancé. Like many other probationers, Drew came into group believing that it would be a waste of his time. However, he describes coming to understand after just a few sessions the effects of his verbal and physical abuse on his fiancé, their children, and himself. Drew attributes his change in attitude to two main things: one, listening to the group facilitators discuss abuse in a broader way, so as to include verbal, financial, and other types of more subtle behaviors that can have harmful effects, and two, to hearing how the other probationers were constantly justifying and blaming others for their behaviors and realizing that he did

not want to sound like or be like them. Substance abuse has also been a problem for Drew in the past but he is now sober and attends 12-step meetings to support his sobriety. In his interview, Drew expressed appreciation for the things he has learned in group and for the fact that he has learned them at a young age.

The reform narrative contains elements of both the remedial tactics of apologies and accounts. In these stories, the tellers admit to blameworthiness but also seek to convince the audience that the bad act or event committed does not represent who he “really is,” or at least not who he is at the present time. They also attempt to explain their past abusive behavior to make it appear less severe to the audience. The following elements of the reform narrative represent various apology and account strategies actors use to remediate their mistakes.

1. The first element of the reform narrative is the shift in attitude discussed above. An important part of this story is the contrast between the “old me” and the “new me”.

”I felt like (this group) was more of a waste of time. (But) you know, when you sit in with the groups you start to realize that you have a lot in common with other people. They might feel the same way but then after a while you know, you adjust. So I adjusted to it now. I feel better that I’m here because I feel like I’m a better person.” -James

“I knew I had an anger problem, but I didn’t feel like this would be something that was the way to look for the, this wasn’t the therapy that I needed. You know I just felt like I had did my time, I did community service. I just felt like this was a little bit overboard. But I’m glad I’m here. It’s working out.” -James

“You know, in some way, shape, or form if you’ve done anything abusive you’re going to hear it in there and you’re going to relate to it and you know, seeing, hearing from somebody else kind of might, at least for me, it made me realize how wrong it was to be doing it, you know, and as weird as it sounds I didn’t see how bad it was. By hearing somebody else, how they done things and I’m looking at that like, ‘wow that’s horrible’, and thinking that I’ve done stuff like that.” -Matt

“Paul said that in the beginning he was on the hot seat a lot, meaning that he was sort of the focus of the group at times and he was confronted about his criminal behavior, about his abusive behavior, and it used to really provoke him and make him angry. In one of his previous groups, he cursed out the leader and got thrown out of the group. But he said over time he kind of...at first learned instead of

talking back and being defensive, he just kept his mouth shut. And after a while of keeping his mouth shut, he said that he really started to think about things. He would go home from the group feeling angry about things that were said about him or things he was confronted with but then those things would start to sink in a little bit and now he says that he's learned to be vigilant and he constantly assessing his own thoughts and his own behavior." -from interview with Paul

From James's and Matt's quotes, we learn that they came to see their behavior as abusive when they listened to the stories the other probationers told about their own behavior. In listening to others' stories, James and Matt recognized themselves in what they heard; it was as if they looked into a mirror and decided that they did not like what they saw. Paul's narrative describes something akin to being worn down by confrontation. He grew tired of arguing with group facilitators and being told that he was wrong, and so he stopped arguing. This then gave him the opportunity to listen to what was being said. Somehow it began to sink in for Paul and he has since learned to pay more attention to his abusive thoughts and behaviors. At one point, according to group facilitators, no one believed that Paul would be successful in group; he was considered a lost cause.

This apology strategy can be seen as a splitting of the "good" and present self from the "bad" former self (Goffman, 1971). This serves both as a testimony to the probationers' reform but also as a promise that abuse will not occur in the future. The alter-ego who was abusive in the past has been replaced with the current nonabusive self.

2. Probationers who tell the reform narrative claim not to have been aware of what psychological abuse (verbal, emotional, etc.) was prior to their participation in the group. They say that they did not recognize themselves as abusive in the past but now realize that they were.

"And I didn't realize that was, you know, so abusive. I didn't think there was anything wrong with that... You know. But I realize now that it is. And, um, I'd have to say my language. You know, I get a little vulgar sometimes where I don't, I don't mean any harm, but again, it's a subtlety. It's, you know, it's being abusive." -Drew

"No, I didn't even know that I was being abusive, you know what I mean? I really didn't. I mean, I'm only 23, I didn't really know I was being abusive. I hadn't been in too many relationships, so." -Matt

“I didn’t think I was abusive. But like now I see like I was emotionally abusive. And like no matter how much she provoked me to do it, it was still my choice to do it.” -Craig

“I asked him what he’d learned and he said he’s learned about the different types of violence particularly financial abuse, that withholding money or being controlling with money is a form of abuse. He said he never realized that things like yelling, being intimidating, kicking things, he really didn’t realize that those things were abusive and one of the things he’s learned in group is the effect that those behaviors have on a female partner.” -from interview with Paul

This type of account for past behavior is an excuse (Schlenker, 1980) which is used to reduce the teller’s responsibility for the bad act he describes. The probationers essentially “plead ignorance” about the consequences of their behaviors and, given the common societal understanding of abuse, this excuse may be plausible to many audiences. It is common in group for probationers to suggest that the only “real” type of abuse is physical abuse and that the rest—verbal, emotional, financial, isolation—while not admirable, are normal and expected in relationships. For the average person, the terms “domestic violence” and “batterer” are probably most typically reserved for men who have injured their partners. A 2005 survey (Carlson & Worden) of a random probability sample of New York residents found a high consensus among respondents that a husband’s overt acts of physical force against his wife constitute domestic violence. Only half of the respondents considered either stalking behaviors or a husband insulting his wife to be domestic violence. This study also found that there was considerable uncertainty among respondents as to what behaviors were illegal in New York State. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that many of the probationers in the DV unit, while perhaps able to recognize physical abuse as a crime, would be ignorant as to the implications of threatening, harassing, or verbally abusing a female partner. The difference between the probationers who tell the reform narrative and their more resistant peers is that this group appears to accept this new definition of abuse and incorporates into their narratives.

3. In this narrative, probationers clearly describe the crimes that they committed.

“It was, it started out verbally and then push came to shove and, and I just, I can’t say I blacked out because I knew what I was doing, but I did something that I, I

always swore I would never do and that, that I've seen other, you know, in other incidences, a man strike a woman. And I, and that, that's not me. That's not my family. That's not my upbringing. And that's what I did. I hit my fiancé. So I'm, you know, I'm not proud of it. I don't like really talking about it much, but, but that's, you know, that's, that's the whole, the whole story." -Drew

"I pretty much, I've been abusive to all of my relationships. Um, before with my son's mother I was abusive verbally. I grabbed her before. Um, that's about as far as that went. Um, with the girl that I'm on probation for... we had gotten into a few verbal altercations and then one time we were at my house and I was mad. I wanted her to leave. I grabbed her, actually I, I grabbed her by her neck and I pushed her into the wall. And she hit her head and um, that was, [thump in background] that was like the bottom, you know." -Matt

"Rebecca: OK. And then the arrest for this probation?

James: That was for choking and putting a pillow over my kids' mother's face."

"I hit her when I was in the car, while she was driving on her side, her whole side was, her ribs and her arm and the side of her head, she had all black and blues from me punching her while she was driving." -Jesse

"Then John asked Jesse if he wanted to say anything to the group. He said that he's learned a lot, that when he thinks about what he did to his ex-girlfriend it makes him sick. 'I abused her in every way...physically, financially, sexually.' He said he will never forget what he did. He told the group to stay focused and never forget what you did." -from group observation

As discussed in previous sections, admitting to one's abusive behavior is the crux of telling the story. These confessions contrast sharply with the hedged and qualified statements which resistant probationers provide when asked to describe their crimes. In the reform narratives, the specific behaviors seem to be stripped of denial and minimization. They often contain references to the effects of the behavior on the victim and a wish to change what happened.

4. While recognizing and feeling proud that they are no longer engaging in abusive behaviors, these probationers have an awareness that they must be vigilant and work hard so as not to fall back into past behaviors.

“I have to watch, you know, I, I’m sure, you know, it’s like a pattern that I’m likely to fall back into if I don’t, if I don’t try to apply these techniques and different things that I learned from group.” -Drew

“I don’t want to lose track and fall off my ways. I’m in a great relationship right now. I don’t want to throw it away ...for me being stupid, you know.” -Matt

“You know, but at the same time I am nervous just about, you know, what if four months from now I forget and I start leaning back into my old ways and I really got to just stay on top of things. I actually wrote myself a couple notes with like, a couple sayings. And I keep them around my room. And every time I get mad, you know, it might be too late, I might get mad and then look at it, but it helps and you know, in the long run hopefully I’ll look at it first.” -Matt

“He says he has abusive tendencies both in the things he does and in the ways he thinks about things. And that the group is helpful to him because he is able to be more vigilant of his behavior. He is constantly reminded in group about what abuse is and how he needs to be on top of his behavior so that he doesn’t lapse into his old ways of being abusive.” -from interview with Paul

This state of vigilance and concern that one might succumb to dangerous old habits stands in contrast to the “it’s in the past” attitude held by the probationers who tell the relationship narrative. The probationers who have accepted responsibility for their behavior (according to the norms and expectations of the group) claim that they have come to experience and appreciate life without violence and abuse and that they are eager to hold onto this new way of life. They recognize that abusive behavior is not something one is cured of, but is an ongoing process of monitoring oneself and developing new habits. This element of an apology is critical to convincing an audience that past bad behavior will be corrected in the future. As Schlenker (1980) writes, “the actor tries to provide evidence that he will henceforth do a better job of monitoring and controlling his behavior” (p. 156.)

### **Discussion of the Reform Narrative**

For the probationers who tell the reform narrative, it appears that the narrative therapeutic techniques employed by the group facilitators are successful. The reformed batterers deconstruct the assumptions and discourses of their narratives and then construct a new narrative based on these new views and assumptions. They are helped to

“free themselves of outmoded stories that once defined who they were, thereby making it possible for them to construct new identities.” (Herman, D., Jahn, M., & Ryan, M. L., 2005, p.376). Perhaps under the feeling rules of the intervention, these probationers’ surface acting gradually shifts to deep acting as they themselves become convinced of their own past guilt. In response, they then leave their former, guilty self behind and construct a new presentation of self based upon new feelings and beliefs about abuse. In this way, the reform narrative is encouraging. It suggests that the DV unit group is doing what it is intended to do: changing the way abusers think and behave by holding them accountable for their actions. What we do not know, however, is the extent to which the changes in attitude and behavior the probationers describe actually produce changes in the “real world,” rather than just in the clinical setting, and which are lasting beyond the period of probation.

The probationers who tell the reform narrative are likely to do so as means of preserving their self-perceptions of efficacy and self-worth, as described by Baumeister and Newman (1994). By acknowledging their newfound control over their thoughts and behaviors, these probationers make themselves powerful and influential actors, rather than passive victims of their own impulses and emotions. They view their past attitudes and actions as inconsistent with their current values and, in describing themselves as reformed, the probationers create and/or preserve positive self-appraisals.

Because we now recognize the degree to which social “acting” is present in our everyday interactions, people have come to place a high value on what is perceived as “real” or “authentic” presentations of self. Both Goffman (1959) and Hochschild (1983) point out, however, that distinctions between the “real” and the “false” selves cannot be so easily made. In the case of the probationers who tell the reform narrative, we may not know if their representations of self reflect surface acting or deep acting, but we should assume that some level of emotion and impression management are taking place regardless. Even behaviors which reflect who one “really” is are still *managed behaviors*. From this perspective, determining whether a probationer’s story is true or a contrivance may be less valuable than examining his motivations for presenting himself as he does.



## *Ambivalent Narratives*

A third type of narrative occupies a space somewhere between the extreme resistance we hear in the relationship narrative and the full accountability expressed in the reform narrative. Ambivalent narratives contain varying combinations of denial and acceptance, victim-blaming and responsibility-taking. The probationers who told ambivalent narratives were able to admit to some amount of wrongdoing, but did not fully embrace all that they learned in group. Some of the probationers who told these stories might consider themselves ambivalent about their crimes and about group, but others seem to want to present an image of themselves as reformed according to the expectations and rules of the group despite things they say which might suggest otherwise.

All of the ambivalent narratives contain an admission of abuse. However, these admissions are usually qualified and justified in some way. These narratives are perhaps examples of the ways in which “people combine remedial tactics in whatever ways they believe will *maximize their expected reward/cost ratio, given the nature of the predicament*” (Schlenker, 1980, p. 157, italics in original). For example, the following excerpt is from an interview with Fred, a white man in his mid-40’s who was charged with assaulting his girlfriend during an argument and twice breaking an order of protection. Fred claims to have had an alcohol-induced blackout at the time of the argument and, while admitting to some wrongdoing, is not convinced that he actually committed the assault. This is an example of an account in which the actor accepts blame yet does not completely relinquish a claim of innocence.

Rebecca: Do you think that you belong in the group?

Fred: Um, that’s a tough question. Um, all my life I was really, I’m not an abuser type of person. I made a bad decision. And I’m paying for that. Um, I, did I put myself in the position? Yes. I could have made a better decision. But the way I guess the courts look at it is that it was a domestic violence situation. Um, there was alcohol involved. And I guess they see it as a problem and they want to cut it at the bud, and I guess I can’t blame them for that.

Fred spent a significant amount of his interview talking about his ex-girlfriend’s past behavior and why he thinks it is possible that she injured herself on the night of the

incident and blamed him for it. The victim's pathological characteristics, as Fred perceives them, offers Fred the opportunity to use the victim as a scapegoat for his current status as a probationer. Nevertheless, he said that he has learned some things of value in the group, such as the different types of abuse, and thinks that he has gotten some benefit from it. He said that he has also realized that he tends to be "bossy" in relationships and that he might need to be more aware of that in the future.

Sam is a 47 year old white man who had been in POG for several weeks at the time of his interview. He was arrested and charged with criminal mischief for destroying his girlfriend's clothes with a chainsaw after he caught her with another man, behavior for which he claims responsibility. Sam told me that he looks back on his behavior and feels terrible but he attributes it almost entirely to the serious substance abuse problem from which he was suffering at the time of the incident. Much of Sam's story was about the alcohol and drug binges that he and his victim engaged in during the several years of their relationship. He described his victim's behavior in great detail, including an episode in which she stabbed him in the chest with a fork. Though Sam says that he has learned to look more critically on his own and other men's disrespectful attitudes toward women, he still does not seem to take full personal responsibility for his abusive behavior. Like Fred's narrative, Sam's account scapegoats both his victim and his substance abuse problem.

Larry is a 40 year old African-American man with a long history of domestic violence and nonviolent crime. At the time of his interview he was new to the probation DV group but had attended VIBS and other similar groups for many months in his recent past. Larry represented himself both in group and in his interview as extremely knowledgeable about the dynamics of abusive and controlling behavior and as having a great deal of awareness of his own violent tendencies. From his first group session, he was extremely outspoken and even went so far as to correct and lecture the other group members about things that they had said. According to his account, Larry was on probation for violating an order of protection by yelling at his ex-wife. He claimed that he "never looked at the paperwork to find out that yelling was part of (the) not-to-dos" specified in the order but he then mentioned off-handedly that, just prior to yelling at his

wife, he had climbed into her window because she wouldn't let him into her home. Larry suggested that his yelling at his ex-wife, provoked by her hanging up the phone on him, was just a careless mistake and not an outright abusive act, and he completely glossed over the fact that he broke into his ex-wife's house to do it. In referring to the violation of the order of protection as a careless mistake, Larry's account attempts what Schlenker (1980) describes as a direct minimization of the event. Despite what this narrative might suggest about him, Larry represents himself as insightful and aware of the implications of his own behavior.

### **Discussion of Ambivalent Narratives**

Group leaders suspect that ambivalent narratives are told for calculated or self-serving purposes by probationers who are trying to avoid trouble and move through the group as quickly as possible. When Fred says that he "can't blame" the courts for sentencing him to probation and that he finds the group "interesting" and "enlightening", despite the fact that he is not willing to take complete responsibility for his crime, how can group leaders know that he is not expressing these sentiments simply to placate his probation officer? When Larry talks about his old violent self in contrast to his current nonviolent self, how can the probation department know he is not just "talking the talk" for the sake of getting off probation as quickly as he can?

Both narrative and impression management theories explain behavior as motivated not only by how the actor will be perceived by an audience, but also how the actor views or wants to view him- or herself. Through this lens, the probationers are constructing their stories in order to make sense of the events of their lives for themselves and for others. For Fred, a professional man who works with children, being violent is inconsistent with his public and personal identity. Whereas he could have taken a highly resistant approach to reconciling these events with his own sense of self, as did the probationers who tell the relationship narrative, Fred also considers himself law-abiding and has chosen to accept the punishment that the law has meted out for him. However, by holding on to the possibility that he did not actually assault his girlfriend, Fred is able to construct an image of himself as a regular guy who made a mistake and must now face the consequences. Sam's story works similarly for him. With a decades-long substance

abuse history, Sam has probably used his alcohol and drug use as an explanation for numerous instances of destructive behavior. Now sober and learning to see himself as an addict, he is able to lump his abusive behavior in with his substance abuse and look upon it as a part of his former, substance-abusing self. In this way, Sam avoids having to examine his violence—probably a painful and shameful aspect of himself— independently and apart from his drinking and drug use.

In my analysis, I have found that Larry's narrative is more complicated. He puts forth a socially-acceptable narrative and hopes to win the praise and admiration of his fellow group members, the facilitators, and me. In certain moments he takes full responsibility for his behavior, yet in others, he shifts responsibility away from himself and toward circumstances or his victim. Larry lays claim to the "reformed batterer" identity but does not fully submit to it. Certainly these are all indications of ambivalence, yet Larry seems motivated less by an internal drive to make sense of events in his life, like Fred or Sam, than by a drive to control his environment and those around him. During his third or fourth week in group, Larry responded angrily when a question arose in group which he felt he had addressed earlier in the session. He sarcastically said, "I don't know if anyone was paying attention but I spoke about this in the beginning of group. I guess no one was listening." He then proceeded to dominate the discussion for several minutes by talking about his relationship. Larry also attempted to control his interview with me by digressing to other topics when I asked him directly about certain aspects of his abusive past. Take the following example.

**Rebecca:** It sounds like there came a time where you weren't physically abusive with her anymore.

**Larry:** Not at all, yeah. That's =

**Rebecca:** But it was verbal =

**Larry:** Yeah, verbal, verbal, screaming, yeah. I realize that my father— because my biological father passed away. He was brutally murdered, by the way, he got hit in the head with a hammer.

**Rebecca:** That's horrible.

**Larry:** They stuffed his head with cotton to keep his brains from leaking out, then they put him in the trunk of the car and blew the car up. This is in Connecticut. That's how I caught my first charge ever in my entire life. Because I got pulled over by the police, and I was on the way to my father's funeral in Hartford, Connecticut. And they told me that I had a warrant from 1984. In 1984 I was still in high school. I never even went to jail. What could I have a warrant for? So I was like I'm not letting you take me to jail, and I hit the gas on the car. Not realizing that there was an officer on the other side with the door opened. And I got assault on a police officer because I actually drug (sic) the cop down the block. And I really didn't do that on purpose.

It seemed to me that this exchange as Larry's way of diverting attention away from his own abusive behavior to focus on an unrelated trauma he had experienced. The graphic nature of this part of his story felt like an attempt to shock and lure me away from topics he no longer wanted to discuss. Larry seemed to be letting me know that he was going to tell his story his way.

The Transtheoretical Model of Change discussed in Chapter 2 supports the notion that ambivalent narratives like Larry's, Fred's, and Sam's represent a "passing through" point between resistance and reform; that is, ambivalence about one's accountability and about the effectiveness of the intervention might represent a stage of change. Larry's narrative could represent a stage in the process of change, a place in which he can work through his ambivalence about his abusive behavior. If this is the case and if the group intervention does what it is intended to do, Larry's desire for control those around him will be challenged in group and he will have the opportunity to "rewrite" his story. In order to test this theory, longitudinal studies of batterers progressing through intervention would be necessary to capture their stories at various times and analyze them for patterns of change. In the final chapter, I discuss the idea that some batterers move predictably through stages of change during intervention and what the implications of that progression might be for further development of intervention.

### ***Incoherent Narratives***

The narratives I have termed incoherent vary widely in their content, themes, and structure. Just as variable are the probationers who told these stories: some have shown

lifelong patterns of violence and other criminal behavior, some have never been in trouble in their lives; some admit to their crimes and hope to learn from the group, while others deny any responsibility and are just marking time until their probation sentences are complete. What all of their narratives have in common is that they are not “good” stories. A good story is one in which the chronology of events is made clear, plot points are connected in ways that make sense to the listener, and effects follow causative events in logical and plausible ways. The meaning the narrator derives from the story should be expressed to the listener so that it is clear why the story is being told and what significance it holds for the narrator. In essence, a good story should have a beginning, middle, and end and should leave the listener with more information and understanding about the narrator than she had before. The incoherent narratives told by several of the probationers I interviewed tended to contain internal inconsistencies and contradictions, bizarre and/or implausible events, abrupt changes in topic, and unconnected thoughts. These narratives are different from the others in that, though they contained themes that were similar to those in the relationship and reform narratives, these elements of these stories did not hang together to create a discernable, consistent perspective.

Rodney is an African-American man in his forties. My first exposure to Rodney and his story came during a supervision meeting I observed in January 2007 at which the issue of sociopathy among batterers was raised. Rodney was described as an example of a probationer who seemed to have little to no empathy for his victim and no feelings of remorse about his crimes. The following week I began observing in Rodney’s group and over the course of the next several weeks, had the opportunity to hear his story and observe his interactions with group facilitators and other probationers. His speech was often disorganized and difficult to understand. There were several instances in which Rodney responded to another group member’s comment with remarks that were unrelated to the topic under discussion or with a lengthy story that was convoluted and difficult to follow. At times it seemed that he was making up stories as he was telling them. In contradiction to the ways in which group facilitators had described him in their supervision meeting, Rodney did express remorse for his past abusive behavior and

empathy for his victim. And yet, in the context of his strange stories and non sequiters, it was difficult to take anything that Rodney said at face value.

In his interview, Rodney told the following narrative in response to my asking him how he ended up on probation. He began by telling me that he had been cheating on his wife with someone he knew from his job, which he said (using a phrase he had learned in group), “is mental abuse to both parties”, meaning his wife and his mistress. Rodney described an argument between himself and his mistress, which led to his slamming the door so hard it almost fell off of its hinges. Then, he said, “I just choked her.” He reported not knowing who had called the police, but they arrived at some point during the fight and arrested him for harassment. After his mistress underwent an MRI at the hospital and a small fracture of a vertebra was discovered, the charge against Rodney was changed to assault. Rodney then describes having to prove to the judge during arraignment that he had “a job that was waitin’ on (him)” and how a letter from his boss was required and was brought to court. This part of the story seemed to have little relevance, at least none that he explained, but nevertheless must have been meaningful enough to him to merit mention. Rodney also stated several times that his mistress ignored the request from probation to provide any statement or additional information about the assault. “She never returned their phone calls,” he said. Again, Rodney provided no further context or explanation as to what this meant to him or why it was an important piece of information in the story. I asked Rodney if, in looking back on the situation, there is anything he wishes he had done differently he said, “I shouldn’t have put my hands on her. You got no right to put your hands on nobody. I should’ve been looking for a way out, no matter if she hit me, no matter if she said she was going to tell, whatever. I should’ve been looking for the way out.” When I inquired about any past abusive behavior on his part, he denied ever physically abusing his wife, but recalled an incident with another woman he had dated several years ago. The story he told was similar to the one that he described about his mistress, but in this story Rodney clearly implied that the victim had provoked him and escalated the argument into a physical conflict.

Rodney's narrative took a strange turn when I asked him if there were any other abusive relationships in his past. The following dialogue took place in response to that question.

Rodney: See, that goes back to when I was little.

Rebecca: Okay.

Rodney: See, when I was little I couldn't get arrested, so, see, see, you see, that's like a double standard. You see, you asked me a question about the cops, right? See, but if I tell you before ten years old where I couldn't get arrested, that's a whole different story.

Rebecca: Alright. Well, why don't you tell me about that period of time?

Rodney: Well, um, I came from a whole lot of fighters. Everybody in my family's a fighter. My dad was a boxer, my uncle (knows), my uncle was a ten degree black belt, my aunt was a five degree black belt, you know what I'm saying? My brother is a, he's a wrestler, a fighter, whatever, so, in all that, we all learned, we, we, they love to fight. We all, my whole family loves to fight. So at, when I was five - was I five? Yeah, I was, well, six, seven. Um, I got in a fight with a kid on the bus....And this little girl that I called my girlfriend, he had slapped her. And I was in the back playing patty cake. I remember this story like it was yesterday. I was in the back playing patty cake and he slapped her. And I heard her cry out, so I went to her and I said, what happened? And she, she told me, he slapped me. I said, who slapped you? And she pointed at him. And I grabbed him, I remember, I grabbed him up and I...I spit a blade out, like that. A boxcutter. And, and I told him, I said =

Rebecca: Did you really?

Rodney: Really! This is a true story.

Rebecca: No, I didn't know if you were pretending to have a blade or if you actually had a blade.

Rodney: I had a blade.

Rebecca: Okay.

Rodney: I spit it out my hand, I was like, [spits] I spit it in my hand, and I told him. I said, I will cut you if you mess with my girl again. And he looked at me, he thought I was playing. I said, oh, you think I'm playing? So I, I told my



friend, hold my blade. I told her, I said, you slap him. She said, what? She was scared. I said, you slap him. Then she stood up. He looked at her. I said, slap him. So she slapped him. I said, now, are you okay? She was like, yeah. I said, now, slap him again. So she slapped him like, three times. Now I told her, I said, now, it's over. She got her hits in. Now, if you do anything to her, it's going to be me and you. And I was like, six years, six or seven years old when that happened. They took me to the schoolhouse. Yeah, the cops, yeah, the cops were called. 'Cause they wanted to know how I got the blade.

This story, in response to my question about abuse in other relationships, was completely out of context. Further, it was both highly implausible and disturbing in its content. This story was followed by another, also about a violent incident, which was even more disturbing and implausible than the first. As the story went on it became more elaborately detailed and bizarre and Rodney seemed to enjoy telling it. His tone and choice of words suggested that Rodney was bragging about how violent he used to be.

The rest of Rodney's interview contained many references to things he had learned during his probation and his speech was peppered with phrases that are commonly heard in group, such as, "You have to learn to diffuse [a fight] and not escalate it." He talked about taking responsibility and not blaming others or external events for one's abusive behavior and emphasized that he now shows much more caring and concern for his wife since he began participating in group. I interpreted these parts of his narrative as produced for the purposes of managing my impressions of him. His use of group jargon and comments indicating insight into his relationship is provided as evidence of his reform.

Kyle's is another narrative that is characterized by an incoherent plot, unconnected thoughts and digressions, and unlikely, illogical explanations of events. Kyle is a 26 year old African American man who, at the time of his interview, had recently begun POG. According to the PO who facilitated his group, Kyle had not been attending group regularly or paying his fees on time, and had been calling the probation department several times a day to complain about his probation officer. Kyle is well-dressed and young looking, he speaks very quickly, and at times is difficult to understand. He agreed to be interviewed by me after group one evening.

Kyle's story about how and why he is on probation for domestic violence was complicated and difficult to follow. He begins by stating that he "made a bad choice" and violated an order of protection by calling the victim. As he tells it, the trouble began when he and the victim (a woman he had been casually dating) were arguing and calling one another repeatedly while both were at work. The victim's boss got angry about Kyle's repeated calls and threatened to call the police if Kyle did not stop. Then Kyle reports that the victim began sending him text messages and he responded to one of her messages by texting her that he wished that her car would crash and her child would be taken away from her. Not long after, Kyle said, the police arrested him at his place of employment. He says that he demanded to be shown proof that he had committed a crime and the police were unable to come up with any. He was taken to the police station where he called his lawyer to bail him out. The story then jumps forward one week and Kyle stated that a detective called him and accused him of making threatening calls to the victim. Kyle said that this detective also threatened him and tried to blackmail him. The events that followed in Kyle's story involved going to court and he recounted different exchanges with his lawyer and the detectives that were confusing and difficult to follow. He claims that his sentence came after the district attorney discovered a charge he received when he was in high school and the judge gave him jail time with three years of probation to follow. With some additional questioning and prompting, Kyle was able to fill in some of the details in his story, but still little of what he said made sense to me. When I asked when the victim obtained an order of protection against him, he responded, "Actually she didn't get it. They forced it on her. The day I was arrested." The exact sequence of events and the charges that were actually made against Kyle are still unclear to me. Even when redirected to pick up the story where he left off after a digression, Kyle was seemingly unable to recount the events in chronological order.

Kyle's narrative contains statements which are inaccurate or unlikely to be true. For example, he claims that he was only arrested on a domestic violence charge because Nassau County has different laws than Suffolk County; he states that in Suffolk County, a crime is only considered domestic violence if the victim and the offender are living together. This statement is not true, but Kyle states that he learned that by "calling

Suffolk County,” though he did not specify what office within the county government he contacted. Kyle also stated that all of the other probationers in the group were physically abusive, whereas he was not. This too is false information but Kyle seemed sure that it was true.

Kyle insisted that he should not be in the DV unit group. When asked if he had learned anything from group so far, he said that he has learned that he has to make better choices about who to date. The following exchange from Kyle’s interview suggests a lack of feeling about the crime he committed.

Rebecca: In the situation that you were in with the victim, what would you have done differently, if anything?

Kyle: Uh, basically I should have never come into work. I should have had called out. If I would have called out everything would be [fine].

Rebecca: So if you had called in sick that day nothing would have happened?

Kyle: Yeah. Because.. like [I] had a feeling [that] it was going to be a bad day. And I wasn’t listening to [my] conscience. And I should’ve just like called in sick.

I did not spend much time observing group while Kyle was participating so almost all that I know about him comes from the narratives he told in our interview. His story contained many of the elements of the relationship narrative—victim-blaming, denial, a sense of paranoia about police and the criminal justice system. However, what differentiates Kyle’s story from the relationship narratives described earlier is that, while Les’s and Vinnie’s stories created portraits of men with strong beliefs and opinions about the situation in which they find themselves as probationers, Kyle’s story is far too chaotic and disjointed to tell us much about what he actually thinks or believes. His narrative presents an image of someone far removed from the reality of his situation.

### **Discussion of Incoherent Narratives**

The incoherent narratives told by Rodney, Kyle, and other probationers not described here led me to question the tellers’ psychological states and cognitive abilities

and to wonder if they are capable of responding to the group intervention as it is currently conceived and delivered.

### ***Context and Implications of Probationer Narratives***

In any situation in which people might discuss themselves—a cocktail party, a date, a support group, etc.—individuals are likely to be hard at work doing any of the things that people do when telling stories about themselves, like embellishing or omitting details, monitoring their speech, or trying to influence the opinions of others. Under these rather ordinary circumstances, individuals construct narratives based on their own subjective perceptions, with their own self-interested motives, and within the narrative auspices dictated by social convention and custom. Though perhaps not acutely aware of the constant editing and meaning-construction that goes on during the telling of a narrative, both the teller and the listener are, on some level, aware that stories cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Add to these ordinary narrative-creating circumstances the restrictive set of expectations under which probationers produce their narratives. In the DV unit groups, probationers must describe to their POs, counselors, and fellow group members events which are likely among the most emotionally-charged and significant of their lives. When they fail to tell these narratives according to acceptable scripts (which they may or may not fully understand), they risk facing the intense scrutiny of the group, including individuals who hold tremendous influence over their lives—their probation officers. These narratives are significant not only insofar as they create and contain meaning for the probationers themselves, but also are important in the process and outcomes of the group itself. As discussed in a previous chapter, facilitators of the DV unit batterer groups use probationers' narratives to assess the men's progress toward acceptance of responsibility for their crimes and readiness to change their abusive behavior. It is certainly likely that some of the probationers in the group make admissions to abusive behavior so as not to be challenged by the group facilitators. Some may even be using the things that they learn in group to manipulate those around them (most dangerously, their victims) into believing that they are no longer a threat. And while, as an interviewer, I had assured the probationers that nothing they said to me

would be passed on to their POs or would in any way affect their probation, it is likely that the probationers still hoped to manage my impressions of them, if only to present themselves and their behavior as socially acceptable. Given the various motivations that may underlie each individual probationer's construction of narrative and the influence exerted by the restrictive context of probation, it is unclear if using these subjective narratives as makeshift assessments is reliable.

### ***Probationer Narratives and Stages of Change***

The narratives described above illustrate a variety of probationer perspectives about domestic violence, the DV Unit groups, and the identity of abuser. When examined as a whole, these narratives suggest that the attitudes and behavior of probationers in the DV Unit fall along a continuum of accountability, from those who refuse to take responsibility for their abusive behavior to those who accept responsibility and work toward self change. The reform narrative tells us that probationers who are accountable for their behavior probably did not start out that way; they began their probation sentence with the same denial and victim-blaming attitudes demonstrated by those who tell the relationship narrative. The reform narrative also asserts that the DV unit group helped them to change their abusive attitudes and behaviors. This shift from denial to accountability suggests that perhaps the probationers who tell the relationship narratives are experiencing a predictable response to the group intervention and will, at some point, undergo the same type of attitudinal and behavioral shift as the probationers who have gone before them. The relationship narrative may represent an early stage of change and the reform narrative may be an end stage. As touched on briefly earlier in this chapter, in the absence of longitudinal data, it is impossible to ascertain the degree to which the narratives told here support the stages of change model. However, the different types of narratives told in this study provide some support for the stages described in the Transtheoretical Model of Change.

The relationship narrative contains elements that comprise the precontemplation stage of change, the primary of which is the probationers' lack of awareness of their problem and the absence of any desire to change their behavior. In spite of all of the evidence indicating that they are abusive with their partners (i.e. multiple arrests, intense

anger, confrontation by other group members), these men refuse to relinquish their identities as victims of vindictive women and a biased criminal justice system. They perceive their problems as external to themselves. This kind of denial is typical of the precontemplation stage. Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) write that, in this stage, individuals are protecting themselves from the risks of recognizing their problems. These risks include a lowering of self-esteem when one realizes that he may not be the person he thought himself to be, for example a caring family man or a person who is always in control. Admitting to a problem means admitting that one is not in complete control of one's behavior, which can be extremely threatening to a person's sense of self-efficacy. Individuals in the precontemplation stage may also fear that, should they admit to problems, they will then be expected to make changes. Some may prefer to ignore the problem over having to make change and, even worse, risk failing at changing one's behavior. As is the case with the probationers who told the relationship narrative, those in the precontemplation phase of change are characterized by their defensiveness and distancing from therapists or others in the helping role. The helping relationship is often seen as coercive and threatening.

The reform narratives are told by probationers who are most likely in either the action stage—beginning to make both behavioral and attitudinal changes in their lives—or in the maintenance stage in which they continue to work on changes that have already been made and focus on preventing relapse. These men have been through the earlier stages and have come to understand their problems with abusive behavior, have weighed the costs and benefits of change, and have committed to non-abusive ways of life. Drew's story describes the relatively recent attitudinal and behavioral changes, suggesting that he is in the action stage. This phase of change is characterized by increased self-esteem and pride in one's accomplishments. Matt's and James's narratives contain elements that suggest that they are in the maintenance stage. Each describes employing specific strategies to manage his anger, reframe thinking, and solve problems constructively. They also express concern that they might relapse into their former abusive ways. Matt in particular discussed his desire to have a place to come where he might receive ongoing support for the changes he has made.

The ambivalent narratives are harder to place in the Transtheoretical Model because it is unclear what the probationers really believe about themselves and their behavior. Fred and Sam both describe the consciousness-raising they have experienced since participating in group and the realization that things they have done in the past have been wrong. However, it is difficult to determine how deep their attitudinal changes run or the extent to which they have actually undertaken any behavioral changes. Perhaps they are somewhere within the contemplation or preparation stages of change, thinking about their behavior, coming to understand it, and making plans to change some aspects of themselves in accordance with their new knowledge about abuse and about themselves.

## **CHAPTER 7 Discussion and Implications for Batterer Intervention Programs**

The Suffolk County Probation Department's DV Unit provides needed services for both domestic violence offenders and victims. However, like most other BIPs operating throughout the United States, the Suffolk DV unit is providing services with no empirical support for the effectiveness of these services. The present study is limited in its design and thus can offer no evidence either for or against the DV unit's efficacy in rehabilitating domestic violence perpetrators or increasing victim or community safety. However, the in-depth nature of the study provides insight into how BIPs like this one work and how they might be improved. What follows are discussions of how this study's results can be applied and recommendations for policy and practice in the Suffolk County Probation Department's DV Unit.

### ***The Suffolk County DV Program in a National Context***

In most ways, Suffolk County Probation's Domestic Violence program is very much like the more than 2,000 programs that are estimated to exist in the U.S. (Dalton, 2007). With limited and conflicting information about "what works" in BIPs, local programs around the country attempt to implement systems of intervention that are cost-effective, feasible, and ideologically and politically acceptable to various stakeholders including victims, victims' advocates, and criminal justice officials. Most importantly, these programs must be effective in increasing victim and community safety and reducing batterer recidivism. As a result of the dearth of information about the most effective interventions, "the best-intentioned efforts (in BIPs) are guided as much by personal opinion, tradition, and clinical experience as by empirically informed knowledge of what works" (Dalton, 2007, p. 72). Nevertheless, researchers, advocates, and policymakers have compiled various recommendations for BIPs and the systems in which they operate based on what information is available to attempt to improve effectiveness and



accountability. *Suffolk Probation's DV program operates within what have been for decades the most widely accepted guidelines and norms of the field.*

For example, the program's content is consistent with the mix of gender-based approaches and cognitive-behavioral strategies which have been the basis of many BIPs around the country. As discussed earlier, controversy exists about the evaluation results of these types of programs. However, Edward Gondolf (2002), one of the most experienced and prominent researchers of BIPs, argues that evidence points to at least a moderate program effect among the Duluth Model/cognitive-behavioral programs he has studied. Further, Gondolf points out that group interventions for batterers are only one part of what is known as the coordinated community response to domestic violence. First initiated and described by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (the creators of the Duluth Model), a coordinated community response "typically involves police, prosecutors, probation officers, battered women's advocates, counselors, and judges in developing and implementing policies and procedures that improve interagency coordination and lead to more uniform responses to domestic violence cases" (Shepard, Falk & Elliott, 2002, pg. 551). This approach is based on the ideas that institutional practices and systems (pro-arrest policies, prompt referral to programs, swift prosecution, sentencing recommendations, coordination among criminal justice agencies, etc.) are crucial in keeping victims safe (Pence, 1997; Gondolf, 2002; Shepard, Falk & Elliott, 2002). Without coordinated and responsive systems in place to send the message that domestic violence is a serious crime and to provide appropriate monitoring and sanctions, batterer treatment can be only so effective in reducing recidivism and increasing safety.

In its very structure and purpose, the Suffolk Probation Department's program conforms to one of the most important aspects of the coordinated community response, which is the joining together of batterer intervention services and criminal justice supervision. A 1998 report (Healy, Smith & O'Sullivan) supported by the National Institute of Justice specifically addressed the key role of probation supervision in interventions with batterers and described probation officers as "the most critical link between the criminal justice system and batterer interventions" (pg. 93). Key probation

policies cited by this report include pre-sentencing investigation, close monitoring of compliance with batterer program and substance abuse treatment, and maximum intensity supervision including weekly batterer meetings. Suffolk Probation's DV unit carries out each of these functions. Further, the collaboration between the DV unit and the community service providers VIBS and the Retreat sends a clear and consistent message to the probationers that the batterers group is a serious component of the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. Whereas other programs are likely to suffer from an "information gap" between the community service provider and the probation department, Suffolk's program enables immediate communication about and response to a probationer's noncompliance. Probation officers and VIBS counselors receive the same training and supervision in delivering services to group participants which allows for a consistency in approach that appears exceptional among BIPs.

Support and services for victims is another important element of a coordinated community response. The Suffolk Probation DV Unit includes a specially trained probation officer who is responsible for assisting victims with safety planning, advocacy, referrals, preparation of victim impact statements, and ongoing supportive contact while the offender is on probation. By incorporating victims' services into the work of the DV unit, the probation department is providing needed services while making a statement about the centrality of victim safety in the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence.

Apart from the coordinated community response, researchers and policymakers have made many other recommendations for improving BIPs including the incorporation of substance abuse treatment, tailored treatments based on subtypes of batterers and socio-cultural differences, ongoing risk assessment, and the expanded use of motivational strategies (Healy, Smith & O'Sullivan, 1998; Gondolf, 2002; Stuart, Temple & Moore, 2007). Suffolk's program directors from the probation department and from VIBS have thus far been given significant latitude in designing the intervention as they see fit and are free to incorporate new methods and strategies for working with probationers. Monthly supervision is utilized, in part, for informing counselors and probation officers about

recent research in the domestic violence field and is an excellent forum in which new approaches can be taught. These aspects of the program increase its flexibility and Suffolk's program has shown flexibility in responding to the varying needs of its probationers, specifically in the development of dual-focus groups for substance abusers and groups for Spanish-speakers. As new information about best practices in BIPs emerges, Suffolk Probation's program is in an excellent position to respond with programmatic changes.

The program would benefit from responding to some of the implementation and management issues uncovered in this study. Specifically, turnover among counselors seems to have a negative effect on probationers, both in terms of the therapeutic relationships that appear to be important in the intervention as well as in a consistency of program knowledge and message. The program already suffers from an information problem in which probationers seem not to understand some of the basic components of the intervention, their probation, and the expectations the system has of them. Frequent replacement of counselors is likely to contribute to the spread of misinformation and inconsistency in procedural and clinical implementation.

Whereas the results of this study show no significant program effect in reducing recidivism among its participants, the description of the program that this study has produced details an intervention which is operating in accordance with the best (and only) practice guidelines available. Until the field of batterer intervention produces new and better information about effective practices, it is unreasonable to expect that programs like Suffolk Probation's DV unit will perform at a level above the national norm.

### ***Examining Interaction in the DV Groups***

We come to understand the group intervention and its participants more deeply when they are examined through the sociological lens of the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959). Impression management and emotion management, extensions of Goffman's foundational theory, further enrich this understanding of how the intervention

functions on an interactional level, how probationers respond to the intervention, and (to some extent) why the probationers and facilitators behave as they do.

The intervention must also be viewed in the context of the criminal justice system. Though the program attempts, in part, to change attitudes and behavior through psychological (i.e. cognitive behavioral) strategies, the impact of coercion cannot be ignored. First and foremost, the batterers group is a punishment delivered by a judge in response to a violation of the law; none of the group participants are there voluntarily. The punitive and coercive aspects of the intervention underlie the motivations of both the facilitators and the probationers as they enact their role-based performances.

This is particularly salient in the emotion management that group facilitators enact upon the probationers. In their creation and enforcement of feeling rules in the group and the coercion they exert in inducing specific emotional responses in probationers (see “checking the file”), facilitators, and probation officers in particular with the inherent power of their positions, create a scenario in which probationers’ emotions become the primary commodity of the intervention. In exchange for tangible rewards, such as timely completion of the group, as well as intangibles like positive regard from facilitators, probationers supply the expression of guilt and shame for their abusive behavior, restrict expressions of anger, and participate in the emotion management of other group members. In her analysis of the use of emotions as commodities in the public life, Hochschild (1983) describes the role of emotion work in our society and wonders about the effect of widespread institutional management of what is typically a private act under the control of the individual. The sense of being stifled, as reported by several probationers, reflects the active control of emotions in group, which was on several occasions described as by the probationers as a limit to their freedom of expression. For the probationers who reported feeling stifled, this emotional control led to frustration and perhaps greater resistance to the intervention.

It can be argued that emotion management is an aspect of all types of “helping” interventions, such as psychotherapy and self-help groups (Francis, 1997). Is it then true that these attempts to change how an individual experiences and expresses emotions are also coercive? The difference is in the legally-imposed sanctions that threaten

probationers who do not manage their emotions and their self-presentation as the probation department deems acceptable. When probation officers and counselors describe the degree to which a probationer “gets it,” that is, how well he takes accountability (i.e. expresses guilt and shame) for his behavior, as an indicator of success in group, they are in essence insisting that the probationer exchange acceptable emotional expression for freedom.

The coercive aspect of the intervention is an integral part of batterer intervention programs nationwide. The connection between intervention and legal sanction is exactly what is recommended with policy statements like those discussed in the previous section of this report (e.g. Healy, Smith & O’Sullivan, 1998). Perhaps coercion is an “active ingredient,” without which BIPs would be worthless. This is an empirical question that is ripe for further research. One suggested modification of programs like Suffolk County’s is one in which the element of coercion remained in the criminal justice system’s enforcement of compliance with treatment mandates, but which incorporates more motivational strategies to engage the participant in the intervention with less of the stifling effect described earlier. Emotion management will probably take place in any intervention in which professionals (or some “director” of interaction) attempt to change the attitudes and behaviors of others. Motivational techniques, however, make these attempts with less reliance on threat of sanctions. The model of change discussed in the next section provides a context in which such motivational techniques might be practiced in batterer intervention.

### ***The Transtheoretical Model of Change and Batterer Intervention***

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study’s data provides support for the stages of change theory in intervention with abusive men. Many of the processes of change (the coping activities individuals engage in when modifying problem behaviors) outlined by Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) are also present in the batterers’ narratives. For example, the increased awareness of nonphysical abusive behaviors and their effects on victims that probationers described emerged through the consciousness-raising activities of the group. Consciousness-raising is described as one of the key activities of those who are helping those in the precontemplation and contemplation

stages of change. Self and social reevaluation are other processes of change that at work in the DV Unit group when facilitators help probationers to see the ways in which their abusive behaviors are in conflict with their self-concepts and social identities. These processes are typically associated with individuals in the early stages of change as well. The anger management and communication skills that are informally taught by group facilitators are learning and conditioning activities that would be described in the Transtheoretical Model as most appropriate for individuals in the preparation and action stages of change.

Clearly, the processes of change are at work in the DV Unit groups. However, facilitators seem to be encouraging all of the processes simultaneously and directing their interventions toward group as a whole, without regard for the fact that group members are most likely at various levels of readiness for change. By applying the concepts of the Transtheoretical Model in a systematic way and matching specific interventions with particular stages, they are likely to have more success in moving probationers through to the end stages of behavioral and attitudinal change. Begun, Shelley, Strodthoff and Short (2001), in an article encouraging the application of the Transtheoretical Model in batterer intervention, tell us that “the vast majority of interventions described in the (batterer intervention) literature are primarily geared toward working with individuals in the later stages of the cycle (e.g. anger management and social skills training)” (p. 109). They argue that these types of interventions, which target the prevention of violence, are likely to be ineffective with individuals in the precontemplation and contemplation stages because these individuals are not yet at the point of recognizing their own violent behavior. By encouraging activities which hold no relevance for the individual, group facilitators may be reinforcing the individual’s belief that he doesn’t need to be there in the first place. This may only deepen resistance to the intervention and cement denial of the problem. Likewise, for those who have come to accept that their abusive behavior is a problem, consciousness-raising activities such as discussing the different types of abuse may lead to frustration and stagnation in the absence of more action-oriented activities. Examining the stages of change, the processes associated with them, and the most

important goals of each provides insight as to how the Transtheoretical Model might be applied to batterer interventions like the DV Unit groups.

### **Precontemplation and Contemplation**

The earliest stage, precontemplation, is characterized by a lack of awareness of the problem behavior. As discussed at length in this paper, batterers program participants often deny that they are abusive, minimize their criminal behaviors, and blame external factors for their difficulties. Research and clinical experience have led some in the field to conclude that most participants enter batterers programs in the precontemplation stage (Daniels & Murphy, 1997). The primary goals of intervention with batterers in this stage are to create a supportive and nonthreatening atmosphere that is conducive to change and to help the individual to become self-motivated for change. Direct challenges or confrontations are discouraged because they are likely to increase resistance. Those in the helping role should demonstrate empathy and engage in reflective listening and questioning techniques that increase motivation. The batterer should be encouraged to discuss the advantages of changing one's behavior as well as the consequences of not changing and be exposed to information about these pros and cons (consciousness-raising).

Those in the contemplation stage have recognized that they have a problem but are not yet ready to make changes in their lives. They are likely to experience some anxiety about what they must give up in order to make a change, such as a sense of control in their relationships (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Batterers should be encouraged to continue examining the costs and benefits of maintaining their abusive ways and to focus on what will be gained (relationships with children and/or partner, avoidance of further criminal penalties, etc.). At this stage, the batterers are likely to be receptive to accounts of others who have been successful in changing their abusive ways (Begun, Shelley, Strodtzoff & Short, 2001). Examining societal and cultural beliefs that result in violent behavior, as is often done in the DV Unit groups, is also useful in the contemplation stage. All of these consciousness-raising activities help to move the batterer toward the preparation stage.

## **Preparation, Action, and Maintenance**

In the preparation stage, the batterer starts thinking about how to change his behavior. He also will begin to take accountability for his behavior and accept that he has a choice as to whether or not to engage in abusive behavior. In some intervention groups, a batterer at this stage might be encouraged to sign a no-violence agreement as a show of commitment to change. He may need assistance from a group facilitator or another person in a helping role to clarify goals for change. For example, is he committing to reducing his verbal abuse or eliminating it completely? Regardless of the specific goal, facilitators must make it clear that violence and physical abuse is never acceptable.

The action stage of change is when the batterer begins to actually carry out change in his life by eliminating abusive behavior and working on changing dysfunctional attitudes and beliefs. In order to best support these changes, those in the helping role should assist the batterer in making choices about the change strategies that will work best for him (Begun, Shelley, Strodthoff & Short, 2001; Daniels & Murphy, 1997). Counterconditioning techniques such as anger management are most appropriate at this stage as are stimulus control strategies like gaining an awareness of the things that trigger angry behavioral responses. Receiving feedback from fellow group members and from facilitators is a form of reinforcement management in that behaviors and attitudes that support change can be reinforced with praise and encouragement while dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes can be discouraged. Having a positive relationship with helpful others—facilitators, group members, or others in the batterer’s life—is also helpful during the action stage (Daniels & Murphy, 1997).

After six months without abusive behavior, the batterer enters the maintenance stage of change. At this stage, the batterer continues to work on maintaining the changes that he has attained and focuses on preventing relapse into abusive behavior. Facilitators should continue to reinforce positive changes in the batterer and aid him in anticipating and preparing for future challenges, perhaps through helping him to develop coping strategies and make lifestyle changes that reduce the risk of relapse (Daniels & Murphy, 1997). Should the batterer terminate the group during this stage, it will be important for



him to have supports in place to aid him in preventing relapse. In Suffolk County, men may participate in a voluntary batterer's group at VIBS for a weekly fee.

### **Relapse and Termination**

In the Transtheoretical Model, relapse to undesired behavior is expected and is not considered treatment failure. Rather, it is seen as an opportunity for the individual to continue to learn about more effective coping strategies. The process of changing one's behavior is not perceived as linear; cycling through the stages is normative and the individual should be supported in re-entering the process after a relapse. Termination of a problem behavior occurs when the individual no longer experiences any desire to return to that behavior and does not need to make any effort to avoid a relapse (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984).

For batterers, however, relapsing to criminally abusive behavior can lead to incarceration or other sanctions and can be dangerous for victims. In the context of a batterer intervention, particularly one situated within or closely connected to the criminal justice system, relapse can lead to the termination of treatment, at least for the time being. In the DV Unit intervention, the probationer has little choice as to when he is terminated successfully from treatment. That decision is made based on the facilitators' perceptions of the probationer's progress in group. In these ways, the final stages of change for batterers differ significantly from those trying to change a noncriminal behavior in a voluntary treatment setting. Other ways in which the stages of change are complicated in batterer intervention will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Assessing Readiness to Change**

Outlined above are the ways in which the stages of change can be applied to batterers' treatment. But how do group facilitators or other professionals determine which change process interventions are appropriate for each individual? Earlier I discussed how DV Unit counselors and POs use the probationers' narratives to determine the extent to which they are moving toward accountability for their behavior. This type of clinical judgment may accurately predict which probationers are ready to move from POG to the clinical group or to complete the group and continue with supervision only,

especially when these predictions come from professionals with a great deal of experience working with this population. In fact, one study asked counselors to rate batterers according to the stages of change they believed the batterers were in and found that these ratings accurately predicted treatment completion (Scott, 2004). Researchers and practitioners have developed measures to operationalize change readiness among batterers in order to assist programs in applying appropriate interventions in treatment. The *University of Rhode Island Change Instrument (URICA)* was initially developed to assess the readiness of patients in psychotherapy to address the problem for which they sought treatment. URICA-DV is an adaptation of the original measure and was designed to assess abusive men's readiness to end the use of violence in their relationships (Levesque, Gelles & Velicer, 2000). Though this measure has several limitations including its sole focus on physical violence and its reliance on batterer self-report, it represents an important step toward the use of the Transtheoretical Model in practice with batterers.

### ***Stages of Change and the DV Unit Intervention***

As mentioned earlier, DV Unit group facilitators are already utilizing several of the helping processes that facilitate change according to the Transtheoretical Model. However, adopting this model in its entirety as a guide for intervention would require radical changes in the Unit's approach, particularly in its emphasis on confrontation and immediate accountability for abusive behavior.

Since we can assume that most of the probationers begin their first group sessions in the precontemplation or contemplation stages, POG would have to be reconceptualized as a supportive place of entry into the change process. Counselors and POs would be trained to utilize motivational techniques. The more didactic activities already in place in POG, such as lessons on the different types of abuse, fit nicely with the goal of consciousness-raising in the early stages.

## **Limitations**

Obtaining the quantitative data for this study was challenging. Although I began with a list of well over 200 probationers who had been referred to or were listed as receiving services in the DV unit in 2004 or 2005, probation staff and I were only able to obtain usable data from ninety-six. As detailed in Chapter 3, more than half of the probationers whose names we received were excluded from the study either because they were not actually probationers assigned to the DV unit, did not attend group during the specified years, or had incomplete records.

All of the demographic and psychosocial data used to describe the DV unit probationers was obtained from the Presentence Investigation Report located in the subjects' probation files. In our search of these files, we found that 28 probationers had no PSI records. According to Supervising Probation Officer June Kenny, whereas judges typically refer domestic violence offender for presentence investigations to help inform sentencing, they will sometimes choose not request a PSI, presumably for expediency in handing down a sentence. In many of the PSI reports we examined, information was missing or unclear. It should also be noted that much of the information contained in the PSI was self-reported by the probationers and was not validated by the probation department. In particular, data on substance use and mental health history may be underreported due to probationers' reluctance to report this information truthfully.

Another challenge we faced in collecting probation department data was that information about probationers is contained in a combination of paper files, scanned electronic copies of paper files, and two different computer databases. In certain cases, data from one source contradicted that from another source. For example, the final charges listed on the PSIs of several probationers differed from that in the probation department computer database. In some cases, the narrative written by the Probation Investigation Officer during pre-sentence investigations contained information that differed from that presented in the PSI document that this study used for data collection.

These data issues are important not only insofar as they affect this study but also as evidence of a need for a more streamlined system of data management. With data that is more accurate and easier to access, the DV unit and the Probation Department overall

would be able to make more and better empirically-supported policy and program decisions and to use data to in grant proposals and other applications for funding.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

In order to conduct systematic, ongoing evaluation of services delivered, the DV unit should consider developing a dedicated spreadsheet or database, separate from that utilized by the probation department, to track the most relevant and significant process and outcome variables, including:

- Names of all probationers screened for the unit with dates and outcome of screening;
- Information on all probationers assigned to the unit including
  - Demographic data such as age, race, and ethnicity
  - Psychosocial variables such as employment status, housing status, and health, mental health, and substance use history
  - instant offense and date,
  - sentence and sentence date,
  - date beginning POG and number of weeks of POG attended,
  - date beginning clinical group and number of weeks attended,
  - VOPs and dates,
  - arrests and dates,
  - outcome of group participation (completed, suspended, violated, transferred, etc.)
  - Outcomes of probationers by PO;
  - Outcomes of probationers by group

Tracking these data will aid in documenting and evaluating the unit's practices and outcomes, identifying variables which may influence probationer success in probation, recognize the work of especially successful staff members or provide additional support to those whose outcomes are below average, and draw upon resources

that may be underutilized. With improved data tracking, the probation department could conduct the analyses presented in this report with relative ease and increased validity.

Since attitude change is a goal of the DV unit's intervention, the use of validated instruments which measure change in the attitudes targeted by the intervention would be useful. Any increase in empirical data collection methods would be an improvement on the use of "practice wisdom" and impressions for decision-making in the unit.

Additionally, as one of this study's limitations was the lack of availability of PSI reports for many probationers, a study comparing probationers who are ordered to undergo PSIs with those who were not so ordered, might reveal useful information about the DV unit population and the information Suffolk County judges use to make sentencing decisions in DV cases.

## ***Conclusion***

This descriptive study of the Suffolk County Probation Departments domestic violence intervention sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the demographic, socioeconomic, and personal characteristics of the offenders in the DV Unit?
2. What are the processes through which intervention services are delivered?
3. What are the outcomes of offenders who participate in the DV Unit's services for one year?
4. Are offender's outcomes related to any of the demographic and/or personal characteristics identified?
5. What are the subjective experiences of the offenders in the DV Unit?
6. How do the offenders perceive the services provided by the DV Unit?
7. What are the offenders' perceptions of themselves as probationers in the DV Unit?

In pursuing these questions, the following was learned about the program:

- The program's structure and operation are consistent with those of Duluth-model programs.

- Services are delivered by probation officers and counselors. They frequently use emotion management tactics to elicit the expression of guilt among probationers. Probationers demonstrate emotion management as well as impression management during their interactions with facilitators and other group participants.
- Topics discussed in group include the power and control motive for abuse, sexist attitudes, anger control, and parenting and relationship issues. Probationers who are new to the intervention demonstrate a higher level of resistance (but little direct challenge) to the intervention, whereas probationers with more experience in group show greater participation in expected group activities.
- Fewer than half of the probationers in the sample completed the group during the two year study period. Of those in the sample for whom data were obtained, 41.8% were arrested at least once during the two years following their sentencing to probation.
- No program effect was found. Crosstabulations showed no difference in arrest rates between probationers who completed the intervention and those who failed to complete. No demographic or psychosocial differences were observed in the probationers who completed versus those who did not complete.

In sum, this study describes a program which, like many others of its kind, can offer only anecdotal evidence of its effectiveness. With improved data management, Suffolk County would be able to provide greater documentation of the program's outcomes. In a wider context, this study offers a case study example of the types of issues faced by BIPs throughout the country. The following questions must be pursued through research and addressed through research-informed policy development if communities continue to rely on BIPs as a means of increasing safety of victims and accountability of batterers

- How is program and policy development influenced by ideological and political interests? How can the gap be bridged between feminist advocacy and empirical research?

- How can program evaluation of BIPs be improved?
- What are the most appropriate and reasonable goals for BIPs: behavior change? attitude change? accountability to victims and the criminal justice system?
- How can programs, with their limited resources, address
  - the multiple etiologies of abuse?
  - mental health and substance abuse problems?
  - motivation to change problem behavior?

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**Appendix A. Pre-sentence Investigation Data Extraction Form**

subject ID:
date:

**Suffolk County Probation Department**

**Domestic Violence Unit**

**CASE REPORT FORM: PRE-SENTENCE INVESTIGATION**

**Personal Data**

- 1. Year of birth \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. POB \_\_\_\_\_                      3. Citizen of \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. English speaking?   Y    N
- 5. Primary Language (if other than English) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Race \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment History**

- 7. Employed?    Y    N    8. Length of time at current job \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Job Title \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. History: (a) stable   (b) sporadic    (c) none
- 11. # jobs in last 3 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Receives public assistance?   Y    N
- 13. Military?    Y    N            14. Branch \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. Type of discharge \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. Annual income \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Offense**

- 16. Charges/Nature of petition \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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17. Final Charge \_\_\_\_\_

18. Conviction/Adjudication \_\_\_\_\_

19. circle one: (a) plea            (b) verdict

**Family and Environment**

20. Living relatives

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

relationship \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

21. # of children \_\_\_\_\_

22. spouse?    Y        N

23. significant other?    Y        N

**Current Living Arrangments**

24. Lives with \_\_\_\_\_      25. Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

26. # others in household \_\_\_\_\_

**Education**

27. Highest grade completed \_\_\_\_\_

**Physical & Mental Health**

28. Physical health    (a) good            (b) fair            (c) poor

29. Significant physical problems

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30. Mental health (a) no history (b) prior history (c) current involvement

31. Mental Health Treatment History

year	type of provider	diagnosis	outcome
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**Substance Abuse**

32. Current Alcohol Use Y N

33. Past Alcohol Use Y N

34. Current Illegal Drug Use Y N

35. Past Illegal Drug Use Y N

36. Impact on Present Offense Y N

37. Substance Abuse Treatment History

year	type of provider	diagnosis	outcome
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**Legal History**

38. Indication of gang involvement? Y N



39.

Year of Arr/Int. Apprehen.	Charge	Court	Plea/Conv/Adj Fact finding Diversion	Sentence/Dispo/ and Year

## **Appendix B. Staff Interview Questions**

What is your job title?

How long have you worked in the domestic violence unit?

How would you describe the goals of the unit?

How successful do you believe the unit is in accomplishing those goals?

What aspects make it successful or unsuccessful?

How would you describe your role in the unit?

How would you describe the counselor's role?

### Views on Domestic Violence and Perpetrators

Tell me about the probationers you work with in this unit.

What are the most frequent problems or issues you see among them?

Do you believe that they all belong in the unit?

Can they all benefit from the group?

Are there particular behavioral or personality characteristics that you believe are common to all of them?

Do you follow any particular theory about why domestic violence occurs?

How did you learn about domestic violence?

### Program Structure and Function

How would you describe the relationship between the Probation Dept. and VIBS?

How well does the relationship work?

What do you think about the supervision you receive?

Do you believe that the supervision is based on a particular theory or understanding of domestic violence?

Is your understanding of the nature of domestic violence in line with that of your supervisor(s)?

What kinds of training have you received regarding domestic violence?

What kind of training would you like to receive?

What are the best aspects of the domestic violence unit?

What would you like to see changed?

## **Appendix C. Probationer Interview Guide**

### **Probationer Interview Guide**

As you know, I have been spending some time observing what goes on in the domestic violence group you attend. So far, I've learned a lot. But the purpose of this interview is for me to learn as much as I can about *your personal experiences* with the domestic violence unit of the Probation Department. A lot of the questions in this interview will ask for your own thoughts, beliefs, and opinions. I would like you to be as honest as you feel you can be when answering the questions. Try to think of this as your chance to voice your opinion about what you are experiencing on probation. I will also ask you some questions about your life history, your family, and your relationships. If there are certain questions you don't want to talk about, that's fine.

#### **Experience in the DV Unit and Probation in General**

1. What do you think of the domestic violence group that you're in?  
Do you think it is helpful to you?  
Do you enjoy going to the group?
2. Do you think you belong in the group?
3. What do you think of the group counselor?  
Does s/he treat the probationers fairly?  
Do you think s/he is good at his/her job?
4. What do you think of your probation officer?  
Do you think s/he treats you fairly?  
Do you think s/he is good at his/her job?
5. What do you think about the other probationers in your group?  
Do you have things in common with them?  
Do you think that they belong in the group?
6. What, if anything, have you learned from participating in the group?

7. Do you think you're less likely to be violent in a relationship after participating in the group?
8. What has it been like being on probation?  
How has it changed the way you live your life?

### **Criminal Experience**

9. How did you end up in the domestic violence group?  
probes: For what crime were you sentenced to probation?  
What happened when you were arrested?  
What happened after you were arrested?
10. Is there anything that you would do differently, if you could do it all again?
11. Had you ever been arrested before?  
If yes, for what crime(s)? Under what circumstances?  
Were you convicted? What sentence(s) did you receive?  
If arrested for a DV crime, was the offense committed with the same partner?
12. Have you ever been the victim of a crime?  
If yes, what crime(s)? Please explain what happened.

### **Family of Origin Experience**

I'd like to ask you questions now about the family you grew up in.

13. When you were a child, was there violence in your home?  
Between parents, siblings, other family members or people living with you?
14. Was anyone in your home violent against you?  
If yes, did anyone from outside your home ever do anything about it? (i.e. other family members, people from school, social workers, etc.)

## **Domestic Violence Experience**

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your relationship with your partner.

15. Before the incident for which you were arrested, was there abusive behavior in your relationship?

(probes: Did you hit, punch, slap, or otherwise hurt your partner? Did she hit, punch, slap or otherwise hurt you? Were either of you ever seriously injured? Was there verbal, emotional, financial or any other type of abuse in the relationship?)

16. What kinds of things would happen between you and your partner that would lead to violence?

17. Can you give me an example of a typical time when there was abusive behavior in your relationship?

18. Have you ever been in a relationship in which there was abusive behavior with someone other than your current partner?

If yes, please describe the kind of abuse.

In what ways was the violence different than or similar to the abuse in your current relationship?

19. What is your relationship like with your partner now?

probes: Are you still together? Are you living together? Do you have plans to stay together? Is there still abuse?

If you are not still with the victim, are you currently involved with anyone else?  
If yes, what is that relationship like?

20. Do you have any children?

If yes, do you think your children have been affected by

Your arrest and subsequent probation?

The relationship between you and your partner (or victim)?

## **Mental Health/Substance Abuse**

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your mental health and substance abuse history.

21. Have you ever been told by a doctor that you have a mental illness or a psychological disorder?

If yes, what illness or disorder?

When were you diagnosed?

Are you currently getting treatment?

Were you getting treatment at the time of your arrest?

Do you think your illness affects how you act in your relationship?

How does your illness affect other parts of your life?

22. Do you have a problem with alcohol or drug abuse? (Or have you in the past?)

If yes, what is the problem and how long have you had it?

Are you currently getting treatment?

If yes, what type of treatment?

If no, have you ever been in treatment?

Do you think that your drug or alcohol abuse affects how you act in your relationship?

23. Finally, is there anything else that you can tell me that you think would help me to better understand your experiences?

## **Appendix D. Victims Services Program Information**

### **Victims Services Program**

The Suffolk County Probation Department's Victim Services Program provides information, support and advocacy for victims of Domestic Violence. The Senior Probation Officer assigned to this program acts as a liaison between victims of Domestic Violence and the criminal justice system. The Sr. PO assists victims in the completion of the Victim Impact Statement for the pre-sentence investigation and informs the court of the history of abuse in the relationship, as well as, the current offense, and safety issues for the victim. The Senior PO discusses safety planning with victims and provides referral information for counseling, advocacy and other services they may need. She provides on-going support and referrals for victims of Domestic Violence whose partners are being supervised by Probation's Domestic Violence Unit and acts as a liaison between the PO supervising the offender and the victim. The victim can contact the Sr. PO to check on the offender's compliance with his conditions of probation, discuss concerns regarding his case and to report on his current behavior in the relationship. The victim will be notified if the offender makes any threats toward her or if the PO supervising his case feels she is in danger. This program also provides information/referrals for those cases referred by other Probation Officer's from within the Department where domestic violence appears to be an issue. Information on how to obtain Order's of Protection, victim's rights, and safety planning is also provided. The Senior Probation Officer is available to meet with victims by telephone, in the office, at their home, or within the community.

The Senior Probation Officer currently assigned to this program is **Terri Dohrenwend**. She can be reached at **(631) 852-2991**.