

# Gender Differences In Characteristics Of Intimate Partner Homicide Offenders

2005

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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CHARACTERISTICS OF  
INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE OFFENDERS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2005

## **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses whether or not male and female intimate partner homicide offenders differ in a variety of characteristics using data from the Chicago Women's Health Risk Study, 1995-1998. Frequencies of male and female intimate partner homicide offender's risk factors were compared to look at how they differ. The areas that were explored were demographics, prior abuse, and the criminal justices response. A number of gender differences were found. Directions for future research pertaining to intimate partner homicide offenders are discussed.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Intimate partner homicide is a crime perpetrated by both males and females (U.S. Dept of Justice, 2002). However, homicide in general is a male-perpetrated crime (Titterington & Abbott, 2004). Males as a whole are more violent in our society (U.S. Dept of Justice, 2002). Research has shown that when women kill, it tends to be someone in their immediate family or an intimate partner that they are not married to but may live with (Block & Christakos 1995; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mann, 1996). According to the U. S. Department of Justice (2002), there were 14,054 homicides in the United States in 2002. Of those, 1,332 were intimate partner homicides; however, women were the offenders in only 287 of the cases, while males were the perpetrator in remaining 1,045 cases. When men do kill their significant other it is often because they are jealous or feel a loss of control (Polk & Ranson, 1991; Rasche, 1993), while women kill to protect themselves, out of fear, and/or the belief that if they don't act first, they will be killed themselves (Browne, 1987, Polk & Ranson, 1991). The extent to which intimate partner homicides are committed differs greatly between the sexes as do the motives behind the victim's death (Polk & Ranson, 1991). The purpose of this study is to address the numerous characteristics of intimate partner homicide offenders as well as to look at gender differences between male and female offenders.

Some of the characteristics that need to be addressed when researching homicides committed by intimate partners are the gender differences of both male and female offenders, with regards to such things as age, race, income and education as well as the

number of children in the home, domestic abuse prior to the homicide, alcohol abuse, weapon use, and how the criminal justice system responds to domestic violence and how their sentences differ. For instance, one gender difference that has continually appeared in research regarding intimate partner homicide is that more often than not, women offenders kill their intimate partners because they are trying to defend themselves from ongoing abuse (Browne, 1987; Polk & Ranson, 1991; Rasche, 1993), while male offenders kill for reasons of control (Polk & Ranson, 1991; Rasche, 1993). Although this difference in motive is clearly prominent, the characteristics between male and female offenders are not, therefore, this study will address those differences.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have addressed male and female intimate partner homicide offenders. The following is a review of these studies as they pertain to the defining characteristics of these offenders.

### Demographic Characteristics

#### *Race*

Often times researchers have reiterated that the color of a person's skin is an important risk factor for intimate partner homicide, be it victim or offender (Block & Christakos, 1995; Goetting, 1989; Mann, 1988). For example, Paulsen and Brewer (2000) compared the sex ratios of killing (SROK) between intimate partners in Chicago and Houston and found that Hispanics had the lowest SROK's while blacks had the highest. They also found that black males were at a much higher risk than black females with regard to being killed by their intimate partners. Likewise, Block and Christako's (1995) intimate partner homicide study in Chicago showed that black men had the highest risk of being killed by an intimate partner between 1965 and 1993. During the years 1991-1993, black males of all ages had a 5.8 out of 100,000 chance of being killed by their intimate partner, followed by male Latinos with a rate of .05 in 100,000, while the female intimate partner victimization rate was highest for black women, followed by Latino women; 3.9 and 1.3 respectively.

Some studies show blacks of both sexes to be at the greatest risk of intimate partner homicide (Mann, 1988; Riedel & Best, 1998), however, others have not (Centerwall, 1984; Hamilton & Sutterfield, 1997; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Paulsen & Brewer, 2000). For example, Jurik and Winn (1990) found that 54% of the women who had killed their intimate partner in Maricopa County, Arizona, between 1979 and 1984 were white. Similar results were found in Centerwall's (1984) research on domestic homicide in Atlanta, GA for the years 1971-1972. At first his research showed that the rate for blacks was six times greater than that for whites. However, after he controlled for socioeconomic status, namely the overcrowding in the households of the black population being studied, he found the rates for black women killing their intimate partner to be more equal to that of whites. These findings, suggest that socioeconomic status should be included in any analysis that compares racial groups.

### *Age*

Research has found that a woman's age may a contributing risk factor for female perpetrated intimate partner homicide (Mann, 1988). Females who kill their significant others are generally older, and older than their male victims (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Leonard, 2002; Messing & Heeren, 2004; O'Keefe, 1997; Wilbanks, 1983), while male offenders often kill intimate partners who are younger than themselves (Goetting, 1989). Shakelford (2001) found this to be especially true in relationships where the couples are not married but are living together. Differences between the ages of intimate partners have been shown to be a risk factor for both female and male perpetrated homicide

(Browne, 1987; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Mercy & Saltzman, 1989; Wilson & Daly, 1992, Wilson & Daly, 1994). Research by Mercy and Saltzman (1989) has shown that spousal homicide risk is increased as age differences between males and females increase, regardless of the gender of the victim. However, some researchers have found that age disparities are not necessarily an issue. For example, Paulsen and Brewer (2000) found in their study of domestic related homicide that there was only an average of 3.8 years between the female offender and the male victim. Other studies have shown that one needs to look at age when assessing a woman's risk for committing homicide against an intimate partner (Block, 1995, Rasche, 1993; Riedel & Best, 1998). For example, Blocks' (1995) intimate partner homicide study in Chicago for the years 1965-1993 showed there is a greater risk for intimate partner homicide when there is a large gap between the ages of the couple. Likewise, Riedel and Best (1998), found similar results. Specifically, they found that when the female is the offender in a common-law marriage, there is a mean age difference of 5.7 years and when males are the offender, there is a 2.7 year gap. Age may be a risk factor for female offenders because these women may have been suffering from abuse for many years and may not feel as if they have any other way out of the situation (Browne, 1987; Shackelford, 2001).

### *Education*

Along with the above demographic characteristics, education level may play an important role in whether or not someone kills their intimate partner. However, data on the education level of women who kill their significant other is contradictory. Some

studies find that women with more of an education may have a better opportunity to escape their partner's abuse before it escalates into homicide (Dugan, Dugan & Rosenfeld, 1999; Dugan, Dugan & Rosenfeld, 2003; Roberts, 1996; Smith, Jurik & Winn, 1990; Moracco & Butts, 1998; Well & DeLeon-Granados, 2004). For example, Roberts (1996) found 59.2% of women who kill their spouse have never made it through high school, 40.8% had received a high school diploma and 37.1% had some sort of vocational training. A woman with less education may have fewer options when it comes to supporting herself after leaving her batterer (Dugan, Nagin & Rosenfeld, 1999.)

In contrast, many studies do not find education level to be an indicator for female perpetrated intimate partner homicide (Goetting, 1987; Grana, 2001; Leonard, 2002) For example, Leonard's (2002) study found that 64.3% of the women who kill their spouses had more than a high school education. Likewise, Goetting (1987) found that 50% of her sample involving women who killed their spouses had completed high school and 23% had education past the high school level. These findings show that higher education levels do not necessarily mean that women can find ways to break free of abusive relationships before someone is killed.

Research regarding the education level of male offenders does not vary as much as female offenders. For example, Goetting (1989) found that 61.1% of the males who had killed their intimate partner had received their high school diploma, whereas Campbell et al. (2003) reported that 48.8% had not finished high school. The difference in the literature regarding the education of male and female offenders is that females are believed to have more of an opportunity to leave their abusive relationship before it

escalates into homicide if they have more of an education, whereas the literature does not discuss how a males education level affects whether or not he commits intimate partner homicide.

### *Income/Employment*

Many women who have killed their partner have been found to have lived at or below the poverty line (Grana, 2001; Jurik & Winn, 1990). Studies have indicated that a woman's economic hardship may be a risk factor for intimate partner homicide offending (Browne, 1987; Goetting, 1989; Gondolf & Shestakov, 1997; Roberts, 1996). Economic stressors such as low income, greater number of children, minimal education, and living in overcrowded housing conditions may also increase the risk of a woman killing her intimate partner. For example, Goetting (1989) found that 78% of the women in her sample who killed their husbands were unemployed and 71.4% were collecting some sort of welfare from the state or federal government. Because of their economic hardship, women with lower income may feel that they have no means of fighting back other than killing the persons who are abusing them. Roberts (1996) found similar results; 54% of the women in his study who had killed their spouses had a family incomes of under \$10,000 a year and 47.6% were on some sort of public assistance. Approximately half of the women were living in poverty and over three fourths had their lives threatened by their partner.

Exposure reduction theory offers one explanation for differences between women who live a life in poverty and those who don't (Wells & DeLeon-Granados, 2004). The

idea behind this theory is that the better a woman's economic status, the easier it will be for her to leave her batterer (Dugan, Nagin & Rosenfeld, 1999; Dugan, Nagin & Rosenfeld, 2003). Likewise, Brewer and Smith's (1995) research on gender inequality in homicide victimization suggests that as the full-time employment of both sexes increases, there should be a decline in the rates of female intimate partner homicide. Block (2000) also found socioeconomic issues to factor into intimate partner homicides committed by women; 87.5% of the women offenders did not have a job and 71.4% had a high school education or less. Women with more money have more opportunities to leave their abusive partners, while those with less may rely on the welfare system. This may often leave them feeling as if they have no choice but to stay in abusive relationships until their breaking point, which may result in their batterer's death.

Male intimate homicide offenders have slightly higher income levels compared to female offenders (Goetting, 1989), even though their level of unemployment is higher (Campbell, et al, 2003; Goetting, 1989). For example, Goetting (1989) found that 63.6% of the male offenders in her study were unemployed and 40% were receiving welfare, while 78% of the women were unemployed and 71.4% of them were on welfare. Campbell et al. (2003) had similar results with regards to income level of male offenders (50.9%).

## High Risk Characteristics

### *Status of the Relationship*

Along with the above demographic characteristics of intimate partner homicide offenders, the status of the partner's relationship has been found to be a risk factor as well (Campbell et al, 2003; Wilson & Daly, 1994). Overall, researchers have suggested that intimate homicide risk is highest when one of the parties (more often the female) is trying to exit the relationship (Block & Christakos, 1995, Campbell, et al., 2003, Wilson & Daly, 1994). For instance, Campbell et al. (2003) found that a male is less likely to kill his intimate partner if they had never been living together and more likely to commit intimate partner homicide if there was a separation after living together. Likewise, Wilson and Daly's (1994) Canadian study found that among the 68% male offenders, who killed their wives, 23% were separated and 3% were divorced at the time of the homicide, the remaining 32% were common-law cases. By contrast, 47% of the female offenders killed their husbands, and among those 10% were separated and 1% were divorced and the remaining 53% were common-law relationships.

### *Alcohol and Drug Use*

Along with the above demographic characteristics, alcohol use has been shown to play a major role in intimate partner homicide (Block & Christakos, 1995; Block, 2000; Blount, Silverman, Sellers, & Seese, 1994; Cole, Fisher, & Cole, 1968; Eastal, 1994; Ewing, 1987; Goetting, 1989; Goetting, 1989, Mann, 1988, Smith, Moracco & Butts,

1998; Thyfault, Browne & Walker, 1987; Weismann-Henelius, Viemero, & Eronen, 2003 Wilson & Daly, 1994). For example, Wilson and Daly's (1994) study on Canadian intimate partner homicide found that 55% of the male offenders had been known to drink alcohol as had 79% of the female offenders. Likewise, Blount and associates' (1994) study of women incarcerated for killing their male partner found that 62% of the victims drank alcohol on a daily basis and only 10% of the men did not drink alcohol at all. Browne (1987) and Walker (1984) found similar percentages of alcohol abuse by male victims; 79% and 88% respectively. Likewise, Smith, Moracco and Butts (1998), reported that 70% of the male victims who had been killed by their intimate partners in North Carolina in 1989 had alcohol in their systems at the time of their death.

Alcohol consumption by either party prior to an intimate partner dispute is another factor that needs to be addressed as it may escalate a fight that is verbal or physical to one that may result in the death of the partner. For instance, the results from Mann's (1988) domestic homicide research on six cities in the United States showed that 36.2% of her female offender sample had alcohol in their systems prior to killing their partners. Similar results were found in another study on intimate partner homicide; at least 32.1% of the female offenders had consumed alcohol prior to the incident (Goetting, 1989). Likewise, Blount, Silverman, Sellers and Seese's (1994) study found that 64% of the female offenders consumed alcohol, however, it is not known how frequently or whether they had consumed alcohol immediately prior to the intimate partner homicide. Regardless, many researchers' findings show that alcohol use by either partner plays a major role in domestic homicide.

### *Children*

Having children in the home has been shown to be a risk factor for female perpetrated intimate partner homicide. Mann (1988) found that 80.4% of her sample of female killers, had children in the home. Goetting (1989) found similar results, 81.1% of the female offenders in her sample had children in the home as did 80.0% of the male offenders. Females often give protecting their children as a reason for committing homicide against their significant others (Gauthier & Bankston, 2004; O'Keefe, 1997; Wilson & Daly, 1992). One possible explanation could include stepparents being overly aggressive with children who are not theirs (Wilson & Daly, 1992). For instance, research by Gauthier and Bankston (2004) revealed that having children in the home that were not the biological children of the male partner led to higher instances of intimate partner homicide by both sexes. Some researchers have theorized that after numerous attempts to stop the violence directed toward their children, a mother may feel as if she has no other option but to kill her partner (Browne, 1997; Shackelford, 2001), or be killed trying to protect the children from further abuse.

## Characteristics Of Abuse In The Relationship

### *History of Violence*

While studies show that males often kill as a means of control (Polk and Ranson, 1991; Rasche, 1993), women do so out of fear (Browne, 1987). Women who kill their intimate partner generally do not have a violent background (Felson & Messner, 1998;

Thyfault, Browne & Walker, 1987; Stout, 1991; Walker & Browne, 1985), whereas male victims (Block, 1995; Thyfault, Browne & Walker, 1987) and male offenders (Felson & Messner, 1998) often do. For example in Blocks' (1995) Chicago intimate partner homicide study from 1965-1993, male victims and offenders had a much higher criminally violent record than any of the female victims and offenders. Likewise, Smith. et al. (1998) reported that one male offender “had an extensive arrest record and had been charged six times for assaulting her (1998:413).”

Numerous studies that examine female perpetrated intimate partner homicides report some sort of abuse by the male victim over a period of time prior to his death (Blount, Silverman, Sellers, & Seese, 1994; Eastal, 1994; Ewing, 1987; Grant, 1995; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Leonard, 2001; Thyfault, Browne & Walker, 1987; Stout, 1991; Straus, 1986). For example, a study by Jurik and Winn (1990) showed that in 86% of the cases where a female had killed her intimate partner, there was evidence of prior physical conflicts, while only 27% of the male offender cases showed evidence of previous abuse. Research on female California inmates who had killed their spouses, found an even greater percentage of offenders being in abusive relationships prior to the homicide, a shocking 100% (Leonard, 2001). This same study also showed that 85.7% of the women who killed their intimate partners had experienced sexual abuse by the persons they killed. Being sexually victimized may make a woman more vulnerable to other forms of repeated abuse which could escalate into a situation in which she feels she is left with two choices; kill or be killed. Stout's (1991), interviews with 18 women in a Missouri prison who had killed their intimate partner found similar results. One woman, for

example, reported “death threats to her, her mother, her daughter , and her cat (1991:16),” another woman said that she was “handcuffed to a table and raped through digital penetration with a candle (1991:16).” Using Stout's (1991) original sample, Stout and Brown (1995) found similar results; sixteen of the eighteen women that were interviewed in her study reported being abused physically, mentally and emotionally. In addition, 14 of the 18 women reported being extremely afraid of the men they had killed, while only 2 of the women felt that their partner had been afraid of them (Stout & Brown, 1995). Their fears were caused by enduring such things as a “concussion, broken ribs, cuts from knives, a split ear, black eyes, a fractured skull, a broken hand, a miscarriage from having been pushed down the stairs while pregnant, stitches to the face and hands, cigarette burns and a fractured back (1995:199).” Findings such as these show that many women in violent relationships live their lives in fear, possibly wondering when the violence will escalate into their own deaths. Fear such as this could easily elicit responses in women to fight for their own lives by eventually choosing to end the abuse, killing their abusers before they are killed first.

Numerous studies have shown that male victims of domestic homicides often precipitate their deaths (Block, 2000; Goetting, 1989; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mann, 1988; Polk & Ranson, 1991; Wilson & Daly, 1994, Wolfgang, 1958), while female victims do not (Easteal, 1994, Polk & Ranson, 1991; Wilson & Daly, 1994). The concept of victim-precipitation is best defined by Wolfgang (1958) as “the role of the victim being characterized by his having been the first in the homicide drama to use physical force directed against his subsequent slayer. The victim-precipitated cases are those in which

the victim was the first to show and use a deadly weapon, to strike a blow in an altercation-in short, the first to commence the interplay of resort to physical violence” (1958:252). Wolfgang's study found males to have precipitated their own death in 94% of the homicides, while females did so in 70.3% of the cases. This study was based on all homicides; however, it laid the groundwork for a new area of research in intimate partner homicide. More recent research that has corroborated Wolfgang's theory of victim precipitation includes Goettings' (1987; 1989) studies that found the male precipitated his death in 71.1% of the cases where the female was the offender; the male precipitated his death, while only 10% of the women precipitated their death when the male was the offender. Other researchers have found similar results (Polk & Ranson, 1991; Wilson & Daly, 1994).

Numerous researchers have reported that many women who kill their partners have been beaten severely over time and on a regular basis, however, not necessarily at the immediate moment that they killed their abusive partners (Block, 2000; Browne, 1987; Ewing, 1987; Gillespie, 1989; Smith, Moracco, & Butts, 1998). For example, Block (2000) did not find that the victim's actions immediately precipitated his own death; rather, women endured violence over a period of time. She found that 80% of the women had experienced some sort of physical abuse at the hands of their partners in the year before the homicides took place. She found that of the 24 cases in which data on the homicide was available, 3 women had been beaten within 24 hours of killing their partners; 5 within the past week, but not the day of homicide; and 7 within the past month, but not the day of their partners' death. In another study, over 90% of the women

who killed their intimate partners had been battered by that person in the past, received death threats from them, and were told in detail how their death would be accomplished (Roberts, 1996). Likewise, Ewing (1987) found that in 100 cases published in scholarly articles, newspapers, magazines, and trial and appellate court opinions between 1978-1986, all of the women had been abused psychologically and physically by the men they killed. Of the 87 cases that listed the details of the homicides, only 29 resulted during the actual violent incident and 18 actually occurred while the man was sleeping or nearly sleeping.

None of the above studies found that the male “precipitated” his own death, at least not in the way Wolfgang intended for it to be interpreted. Women do not simply forget the beatings they endure, and the fear for their own safety becomes the primary focus of their minds. Nevertheless, this fear may not be acted upon immediately.

Battered women see these threats as real and they often believe that the only chance they have for survival is to kill their intimate partners first (Browne, 1987). As each day passes, they anticipate with terror what the next day may bring. This is not the case for male offenders, who generally have the physical advantage in intimate relationships, therefore their reason for killing is not out fear, but the need to control.

### *Weapon Use*

When it comes to killing their intimate partner, males appear to do so with a variety of weapons, while females tend to commit their crime with just two primary types. For instance, Silverman and Mukherjee (1987) found that in male perpetrated

intimate partner homicides, stabbing (31.7%), beating (24.6%), shooting (16.7%), strangling (14.3%) and suffocation (4.8%) were the most common ways of committing the murder. Women who kill their significant other seem to prefer using guns or knives (Browne, 1987; Goetting, 1989; Mann, 1996; Mercy & Saltzman, 1989; Paulsen & Brewer, 2000; Smith, Moracco & Butts, 1998). According to Wolfgang (1958), a woman's decision to use a knife to kill her significant other could be due to the availability of the weapon in her household duties. Similar results were found in a Detroit study; 55.4% of the men killed by their significant other died from being shot, 41.4% were stabbed and only 3.6% were beaten with a baseball bat (Goetting, 1987; Mann, 1996). Likewise, Wilbanks (1983) found that 53.2% of the females who had killed their intimate partner had used a handgun to commit the murder, 59.6% had used any type of gun and 25.5% had used a knife. The female weapon of choice in most studies was either a gun or a knife, whereas males committed murder by strangling or suffocating their victims, in addition to using a gun or knife. The hands on approach to killing a person shows the savagery behind the attack, leading one to believe that females could indeed be killing out of fear and need for survival, while males may do so for control reasons.

### *Suicide*

One of the characteristics that appears to be unique to male intimate homicide offenders is that they may commit suicide after they kill their intimate partner, whereas females have not been found to do so (Block & Christakos, 1995; Easteal, 1994; Lund &

Smorodinsky, 2001). For example, Lund and Smorodinsky (2001) found that the only intimate partner homicides that ended with the perpetrators killing themselves were those in which the male was the offender and their weapon of choice was a firearm. These males were generally white and the husbands of the victims. Likewise, research by Easteal (1994) found that all but one of the homicide/suicide cases in her study was perpetrated by males. She found that the male often committed both the homicide and suicide due to one of two reasons; either the victim was elderly and it was a mercy killing or there had been a recent separation and the male was jealous.

### The Criminal Justice Response

Often times the way the criminal justice system responds to a woman's victimization is not ideal. For instance, Hamilton and Sutterfield (1998) found that only 5% of the males who had been killed by their spouse had been arrested when the police responded to prior domestic disputes. They found that 45% of the women incarcerated for killing their partner had contacted the police about a domestic disturbance with the man they killed prior to the homicide, often more than once. They also found that none of the women who had called the police prior to their partner's death had been taken to a shelter. If a woman has previously called the police with no support from them, she may feel that the legal system is not the answer to stopping the violence she endures in her home, therefore feeling the need to take things into her own hands.

Research on how the criminal justice system sentences women who have killed their abusive partner has varied. For example, Stout (1991) revealed very harsh sentences for female offenders. Stout interviewed 18 women in 1989 that were in a Missouri prison for killing their intimate partner. She found that of those 18 women; half received life sentences with no possibility of parole or no possibility before 50 years; 3 had life sentences with the possibility of parole; 3 were sentenced to 15-19 years; and 3 received 7-10 years. Of these 18 women, 16 reported battering in the relationship. Only 5 of the 16 women were allowed to present evidence during their trial about the abuse they had endured at the hands of the man they killed. One bias of this study is that the sample was only drawn from those women who had been incarcerated for killing their abusive partner. Titterington and Abbott (2004) found less harsh sentences for female intimate homicide offenders in Houston, TX; only 15.8% of the female intimate homicide offenders were imprisoned for killing their spouse during 1985-1994.

With regard to sentencing, male intimate partner homicide offenders often receive harsher sentences than female offenders (Goetting, 1989, Mann, 1996). For example, Goetting (1989) found that the prison sentences of male offenders (88.2%) were longer than female offenders (57.1%). These findings show that although both males and females are breaking the law by killing their intimate partners, the criminal justice system may indeed be taking into account the abuse that women may be enduring in their relationships.

## Discussion

Women who kill their intimate partner are generally not violent, that is until they feel as if their lives are in danger. However, that cannot be said about most male offenders. Fatal outcomes between partners are often the result of the male being physically aggressive over time and often immediately before the final confrontation (Smith, et al., 1998). This critical characteristic of the homicide is often accompanied by other factors such as income, education, age, race, gun ownership, children in the home, length of relationship, the status of the relationship, controlling behaviors, and levels of fear in the relationship. Even though prior abuse by the male has continually been shown to be the primary risk factor for intimate partner homicide, all of the other factors need to be addressed when trying to understand the differences between male and female offenders.

Further research needs to be conducted to address and compare the characteristics associated with the offenders of intimate partner homicide. For instance, there is a need to control for such things as socioeconomic factors when addressing race as a factor for intimate partner homicide. Black men and women are more likely to commit more intimate partner homicide, but they are also more likely to live in overcrowded housing and live below the poverty level which in itself will add additional stress to any relationship that is already abusive. Many of the studies reviewed did not appear to take this into consideration.

Additional research needs to find out why age should be considered a risk factor for perpetration of intimate homicides committed by males or females. Researchers have shown that the larger the gap between two intimates ages, the greater the risk of a homicide occurring. A gender comparison also needs to be made in regard to police contact in previous domestic disputes as well as sentencing outcomes to compare the way the criminal justice system handles male and female offenders. This is necessary because research has shown that more often than not, there are huge differences between why a female kills her intimate partner and why a male does. A final need of further study is that of victim precipitation. Many of the women who kill their intimate partners have been terrorized for some time before they killed their batterers. More interviews need to be conducted with these women as well as male offenders of intimate partner homicide to find out what exactly happened in the days prior to the homicides.

## The Present Study

The research reviewed, suggests that there are certain factors that characterize male and female homicide offenders. The purpose of this study is to further examine these characteristics to see if there is indeed a gender difference. Factors such as race, age, income, education, children in the home, weapon use, levels of abuse, victim precipitation, police response to prior domestic incidents, and sentencing outcomes will be addressed. Distinguishing these gender differences between intimate partner homicide offenders is needed in order to educate abused women, the organizations that help them

and the criminal justice system in order to aid those who may be in abusive relationships before they escalate into homicide.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The data used for this study are from the Chicago Women's Health Risk Study, 1995-1998 (Block, 2000). Block's (2000) study was designed to create a profile of risk factors that may be directly associated with intimate partner homicide or serious injury between intimate partners in the hopes that organizations that serve battered women would be able to utilize the information. The original data was collected using a quasi-experimental design to compare battered women to non-battered women and relationships that ended in homicide and those that did not. The abused/non-abused data came from interviews and surveys with 705 females who had been seen at one of the four major medical sites in Chicago (Cook County Hospital, Erie Family Health Center, Chicago Women's Health Center, and Roseland Public Health Center). Of the 705 women used in the study, 497 reported being battered in the past year; the remaining 208 women were used as the comparison group because they had reported no abuse in the past year. The homicide sample for the study was drawn from two sources, the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office and HOMICIDES IN CHICAGO, 1965-1995, utilizing only the data for homicides that occurred in 1995 or 1996. When the offender was available, researchers attempted to contact them and followed the same steps as the non-homicide sample. Proxy interviews were also completed with people who were close to either the victim of the homicide or the offender to gain valuable information regarding the couple's relationship in the year prior to the incident. Information was also gathered from records that were either public or official, including court documents,

statements from witnesses and newspaper clippings. The original study found that during the two year period, there were 87 intimate partner homicides, of which 28 were committed by women and 59 by men. There are 15 Parts to the study, however, only Parts 13 and 14 will be addressed because they contain information about intimate partner homicides. Part 13 provides information from the charged narrative with regard to the age disparity between the offender and their victim. Part 14 includes information from the proxy interviews, and/or interviews with the 26 women offenders and 50 male offenders. Some of the variables that are unique to Part 14 contain information on education level, income, number of children in the home, types of physical violence and the severity of each incident over time, patterns of leaving and returning between the victim and offender, length of the relationship, injuries sustained during the relationship, prior arrests, and the sentencing outcome from the homicide offense. The variables that will be used from Parts 13 and 14 have been taken from the CWHRS codebook and are described below. A descriptive analysis will be conducted on the different variables to find out the number of times that the characteristics may have occurred prior to the homicide. Certain variables pertaining to victim precipitation and sentencing outcomes will be addressed looking at both male and female offenders to see if there are gender differences.

## Demographic Characteristics

Demographic information was obtained from the homicide offender and proxy

interviews. Variables regarding the sex of the victim and offender (male, female or same sex), age disparity between victim and offender (recoded in same age within 5 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 13 years 10 to 19 years and 20 to 39 years). The race and ethnic group of the victim and offender were coded (Black/ African American, White/ Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian/ Pacific Islander, Native American, multi-racial and other). The relationship between the victim and the offender ranged from husband/wife, ex, fiancé, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-dating partner, child's father. Responses regarding the victim's marital status at the time of death (ranging from single, married to partner, married to someone else, common law to partner, engaged) and if the offender/victim were living together (yes, no, N/A), the length of the relationship between the victim and offender (less than one month, one month to a year, over a year, not asked), and whether or not the offender had ever left the relationship or stayed away ( yes, no). The offender interviews contained responses regarding the type of children living in the household (none, just the couple's biological children, just her/his children, hers from previous and partners from previous relationship). Proxies and offenders reported that the education level of the victim/offender ranged from no schooling, elementary school, some high school, four year college, grad or professional degree, level, the offender having more education to the victim having more of an education. The offender's employment status at the time of the homicide varied from full time, part time, student, unemployed. Although information was not available for male offenders, the proxies and offenders were asked what the female offender's personal income was the year before the homicide (responses coded in \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000 and \$30,000 increments) as well as what the male and

female offender's household income was (responses coded in \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000, etc).

## High Risk Characteristics

The offenders and proxies were asked if the offender had ever had a problem with alcohol (yes, no), and was offender using drugs or alcohol during the last incident (yes/no alcohol, yes/no drugs, no neither, N/A). Proxies and offenders were asked if there were children in the home, who did they belong to (couple's biological children, just her children, just his children, someone else's child).

## Characteristics Of Abuse In The Relationship

### *Control Issues in the Relationship*

Controlling behaviors were addressed by asking offenders and proxies whether or not the offender was afraid of the victim (yes, no), did the offender control the victims daily activities (yes, no), did the offender ever feel as if his/her life was in danger (yes, no), was the offender violently and constantly jealous (yes, no), did the offender limit the victim's contact with family and friends (yes, no), had the offender ever threatened to kill himself or herself (yes, no), did the offender ever threaten to kill the victim (yes, no).

### *History of Violence in the Relationship*

Proxies and offenders were interviewed regarding whether or not the female had

been abused in the year prior to the homicide (yes, no), who was the first to use/threaten violence (victim, offender, someone else, N/A), was the offender ever injured by the victim (yes, no, yes/but not in past year, N/A), and when was the most recent violent incident (same day/within 24 hours of victim's death, same week but not the same day, same month but not that week).

#### *Other Violent Incidents in the Relationship*

Other acts of violence were looked at using responses from the following questions. Did the offender ever throw anything at victim (yes, no), did the offender ever push, grab or shove the victim (yes, no), did the offender ever slap the victim (yes, no), did the offender ever kick, bit or hit the victim (yes, no), did the offender ever hit the victim with an object that could injure (yes, no), did the offender ever beat the victim up (yes, no), did the offender ever choke the victim (yes, no), did the offender ever threaten to or use a knife (yes, no), did the offender ever injure the victim with a knife (yes, no), did the offender ever threaten to use a gun (yes, no), did the offender ever injure the victim with a gun (yes, no), and did the offender ever force the victim to have sex (yes, no).

#### *The Final Incident*

The proxies and offenders were asked who initiated the violence in the final incident (male offender, female victim, unknown), was there forced sex in the final incident (yes, no), was the final incident sparked by someone trying to leave (yes, no),

was jealousy an issue in the final incident (yes, no), was infidelity an issue in the final incident (yes, no), and did the respondent feel as if the offender meant to kill the victim (yes, no).

### *Weapon Use*

Offenders and proxies were asked whether or not the offender had guns in the home (yes, no), whether the guns were kept loaded (yes, no), and what type of weapon the offender used to kill the victim (gun, knife, strangulation, other).

### *Suicide*

Proxies and offenders were asked whether or not the offender committed suicide (yes, no) and whether or not the offender had ever tried to commit suicide in the past (yes, no).

## The Criminal Justice Response

Offenders and proxies were asked whether or not the offender was violent outside of the home (yes, no, N/A), had the offender ever been arrested (yes, no), if so what was the charge (domestic violence, other violent crime against a person, alcohol or drug related offenses, robbery), was the offender arrested by police for the homicide incident (died at scene, offender never apprehended, yes, no), what was the offender charged with (homicide, manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, justifiable homicide), what was the

offender found guilty of ( homicide, manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, justifiable homicide).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics

Information on the demographic characteristics of the offenders came from several sources; the charged narrative, interviews with the offenders and interviews with proxies who were close to the offender. The results are discussed below and are presented in Table 1.

#### *Race*

According to the offender and proxy interviews, the sample of offenders of intimate partner homicide were primarily black. Nearly all of the female offenders were black (92.3%) as were two thirds of the male offenders (71.4%), however, 12.2% of the male offenders were white, non-Hispanic and 16.3% were Hispanic.

#### *Age*

Information from the charged narrative with regard to the age disparity between offenders and their victims found that just as many male offenders as female offenders kill their partner when there is under a five year age gap between them. Male offenders are three times more likely to kill their intimate partners when they were five to nine years older and female offenders are four times as likely to kill their partner when they were 20 to 39 years younger.

### *Education*

Information on the education level of the offenders was drawn from offender and proxy interviews and is missing for five of the female offenders and twelve of the male offenders. Among the cases in which information was available, both female and male offenders of intimate partner homicide generally have a limited high school education or less, while female offenders (14.3 %) are more likely to have a college education than male offenders (2.7%).

### *Income/Employment*

Information on employment of the offenders was drawn from offender and proxy interviews and is missing for two of the female offenders and one of the male offenders. Male offenders (37.5%) were employed full time more often than female offenders (12.5%), while over half of the female offenders (58.4%) were unemployed and just over one fourth (29.2%) of the male offenders were unemployed. Being on public aid or disability was more common for female offenders (20.8%) than for male offenders (4.2%), while more female offenders were reported as being a prostitute (4.2%) or a homemaker (4.2%), and more males were reported being a drug dealer (9.3%) or belonging to a gang (4.2%).

Information on the offender's household income the year before the death was drawn from offender and proxy interviews and is missing for eleven of the male offenders and four of the female offenders. Proxies and offenders reported male offenders having a higher income than female offenders. The largest proportion of

offender's household income bracket was in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range for male offenders (31.6%) and in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range for female offenders (45.5%). None of the female offender's households made less than \$5,000, while a few (15.8%) of the male households made less than \$5,000 a year. Information on the personal income in the year prior to the homicide was only available for 23 of the female offender's and none of the male offenders. A third of the women had \$5,000 to \$10,000 worth of personal income and another third had a personal income between \$10,000 to \$20,000. A much smaller percent (13.0%) had no personal income at all.

Demographically male and female intimate partner homicide offenders are similar with regards to race and low education levels. However, differences appear with regard to their income and employment. More male offenders fell into the lowest and highest income brackets than female offenders and female offenders were more often unemployed or on public aid or disability.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Black	92.3 (24)	71.4 (35)
% White, Non-Hispanic	0.0 (0)	12.2 (6)
% Hispanic	0.0 (0)	16.3 (8)
% Native American	3.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Other	3.8 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Woman Same Age as Partner Within 5 Years	53.6 (15)	54.4 (31)
% Woman 5 to 9 Years Older Than Partner	3.6 (1)	10.5 (6)
% Woman 10 to 13 Years Older than Partner	7.1 (2)	3.5 (2)
% Partner 5 to 9 Years Older	17.9 (5)	15.8 (9)
% Partner is 10 to 19 Years Older	10.7 (3)	14.0 (8)
% Partner is 20 to 39 Years Older	7.1 (2)	1.8 (1)
% Limited High School Education or Less	71.5 (15)	78.4 (29)
% High School Diploma or GED	14.3 (3)	16.2 (6)
% College or Vocational School	14.3 (3)	2.7 (1)
% Junior of Community College	0.0 (0)	2.7 (1)
% Unemployed	58.4 (14)	29.2 (14)
% Full Time Job	12.5 (3)	37.5 (18)
% Part Time Job	0.0 (0)	6.3 (3)
% Public Aid or Disability	20.8 (5)	4.2 (2)
% Homemaker	4.2 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Prostitute	4.2 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Drug Dealer	0.0 (0)	8.3 (4)
% Gang Member	0.0 (0)	4.2 (2)
% Other Job	0.0 (0)	10.3 (5)
% Household Income Less Than \$5,000	0.0 (0)	15.8 (6)
% Household Income \$5,000 to \$10,000	31.8 (7)	18.4 (7)
% Household Income \$10,000 to \$20,000	45.5 (10)	21.1 (8)
% Household Income \$20,000 to \$30,000	18.2 (4)	31.6 (12)
% Household Income \$30,000 to \$40,000	4.5 (1)	7.9 (3)
% Household Income \$40,000 to \$50,000	0.0 (0)	5.3 (2)
% No Personal Income	13.0 (3)	No Data
% Personal Income Less Than \$5,000	13.0 (3)	No Data
% Personal Income \$5,000 to \$10,000	34.8 (8)	No Data
% Personal Income \$10,000 to \$20,000	34.8 (8)	No Data
% Personal Income \$20,000 to \$30,000	4.3 (1)	No Data

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

## High Risk Characteristics

There are numerous characteristics that may place intimate partners at a greater risk for committing homicide. These high risk characteristics include such things as the status of the relationship, alcohol and drug use, and whether or not there are children in the home. All of these are addressed below and presented in Table 2.

### *Status of the Relationship*

Information on the relationship between the offender and his/her victim and the length of the relationship prior to the homicide was drawn from offender and proxy interviews. The relationship between the female and male offenders and their victims varied. Compared to female offenders, male offenders were less likely to kill their current spouses or common-law partners and more likely to kill their ex- or former girlfriends. However, male offenders more often killed their girlfriends (32.7%) and female offenders more often killed their common-law partners (30.8%). The length of the relationship prior to the homicide was usually over a year for a majority of both male (67.3%) and female (76.9%) offenders. However, the difference between the offender's relationships was that half of the female offenders had tried to leave or stay away from their male victim. Almost one quarter of the female offenders had left or stayed away during the relationship compared to 16.3% of the male offenders, and just over a quarter of the female offenders had asked the male victim to stay away while none of the male offender's victims had done so.

### *Alcohol and Drug Use*

Information on alcohol use by the offender was drawn from offender and proxy interviews and is missing for seven of the male offenders. Male offenders (61.9%) were known to have a problem with alcohol more often than female offenders (42.3%).

Information on whether or not the offender had been drinking or doing drugs during the final incident was missing for three female offenders and eleven male offenders. For those offenders in which data was available, alcohol consumption with or without drug use during the incident was higher for female offenders than male offenders, however, drug use with or without alcohol consumption was higher for male offenders.

### *Children*

Information on children in the home at the time of the homicide was drawn from offender and proxy interviews and was only available for female offenders. A large percentage (65.4%) of the female offenders of intimate partner homicide had children in their home at the time of the incident. In 7.7% of the cases, it was the couple's biological children, in 19.2% of the cases it was just her children, in 15.4% of the cases it was the couple's along with her children, in 3.8% of the cases it was both someone else's and their own children living in the house and in 3.8% of the cases it was someone else's kids and hers in the household.

Table 2. High Risk Characteristics

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Husband or Wife	26.9 (7)	16.3 (8)
% Ex- or Former Husband or Wife	0.0 (0)	2.0 (1)
% Common-law Relationship	34.6 (9)	24.5 (12)
% Boyfriend or Girlfriend	30.8 (8)	32.7 (16)
% Ex- or Former Boyfriend/Girlfriend	7.7 (2)	22.4 (11)
% Fiance	0.0 (0)	2.0 (1)
% Length of Relationship Less Than One Year Before Homicide	16.7 (4)	17.5 (7)
% Length of Relationship Over One Year Before Homicide	83.3 (20)	82.5 (33)
% Offender Left or Stayed Away	25 (6)	18.6 (8)
% Offender Asked Victim To Leave or Stay Away	29.2 (7)	0.0 (0)
% Offender Asked, But Victim Refused To Leave or Stay Away	4.2 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Offender Never Left or Stayed Away	41.7 (10)	81.4 (35)
% Offender Known to Have an Alcohol Problem	42.3 (11)	61.9 (26)
% Offender Not Known to Have an Alcohol Problem	57.7 (15)	38.1 (16)
% Offender Drinking Alcohol During Final Incident	30.4 (7)	18.4 (7)
% Offender Using Drugs During Final Incident	17.4 (4)	18.4 (7)
% Offender Using Both Alcohol and Drugs During the Final Incident	26.1 (6)	34.2 (13)
% Offender Not Using Alcohol or Drugs During the Final Incident	26.1 (6)	28.9 (11)
% Children not Fathered by Male in Home	19.2 (5)	No Data

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

## Characteristics of Abuse in the Relationship

There are numerous characteristics of abuse that need to be addressed in intimate partner relationships that end in homicide, such as control issues, abuse history, weapon use, suicide, and what occurred in the final incident. All of these issues are addressed below as well as in Tables 3 to 7.

### *Control Issues in the Relationship*

Information with regard to whether or not the offender was afraid of the victim was missing for seven of the male offenders and three of the female offenders. For the remaining offenders, females were ten times more likely to be afraid of their male victims than male offenders were of their female victims. Male offenders (46.3%) were more likely to control their victim's daily activities than female offenders (18.8%) were, however, information was missing for eight of the male offenders and ten of the female offenders. Information on whether or not the offender ever thought their life was in danger was missing for seven of the male offenders and four of the female offenders. The majority of the male offenders (90.5%) did not feel as if their lives were in danger. By comparison, 40.9% of the female offenders did believe that their lives were in danger. Information regarding whether or not the offender was ever violently and constantly jealous was missing for sixteen of the male offenders and fourteen of the female offenders. For those which information was available, violent and constant jealousy by the offender was common in for both male and female offenders. Information with

regard to whether or not the offender limited the victim's contact with family and friends was missing for three of the male offenders and eight of the male offenders. Both male and female offenders appeared to do this about half of the time. Male offenders were twice as likely to threaten to kill themselves during the relationship compared to female offenders. Male offenders (33.3%) were more likely to threaten to kill their female victims in comparison to female offenders (23.1%), although information on ten male offenders and thirteen female offenders was missing in this category.

Table 3. Control Issues in the Relationship

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender Afraid of the Victim	47.8 (11)	4.8 (2)
% Offender Not Afraid of the Victim	52.2 (12)	95.2 (40)
% Offender Ever Control Victim's Daily Activities	18.8 (3)	46.3 (19)
% Offender Never Controlled Victim's Daily Activities	81.2 (13)	53.7 (22)
% Offender Ever Thought Their Life was in Danger	40.9 (9)	2.4 (1)
% Offender Never Thought Their Life Was in Danger	50.0 (11)	90.5 (38)
% Offender May Possibly Have Thought Their Life was in Danger, Although Not Sure	9.1 (2)	7.1 (3)
% Offender was Ever Violently and Constantly Jealous	62.5 (10)	65.7 (23)
% Offender Never Violently and Constantly Jealous	37.5 (6)	34.3 (12)
% Offender Limit the Victim's Contact with Family and Friends	55.6 (10)	50.0 (23)
% Offender Did Not Limit the Victim's Contact with Family and Friends	44.4 (8)	50.0 (23)
% Offender Ever Threaten to Kill Themselves	23.1 (3)	33.3 (13)
% Offender Had Not Ever Threatened to Kill Themselves	76.9 (10)	66.6 (26)
% Offender Ever Threaten to Kill the Victim	41.7 (5)	63.6 (21)
% Offender Never Threatened to Kill the Victim	58.3 (7)	36.4 (12)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

### *History of Violence in the Relationship*

Information with regard to the female (offender or victim) being abused in the year prior to the homicide was missing for two male offenders and one female offender. Most of the male offenders had abused their female victims in the year prior to the homicide (87.2%) and almost as many female offenders (80.0%) had been abused in the year prior to the homicide by their male victims. Information on who was the first to use or threaten to use violence was missing for six of the female offenders and sixteen of the male offenders. For those male offenders for whom information was available, nearly all (87.9%) were the first to threaten or use violence, while only 5.0% of the female offenders did so. By comparison, female offenders were more than seventeen times less likely than male offenders to be the first ones to threaten or use violence in their relationships. Female offenders were over five times more likely to have been injured by their male victims than male offenders were, however, information was missing for six of the female offenders and seventeen of the male offenders. Homicides in which females were the offender occurred more often within 24 hours (15.0%) of a recent violent incident when compared to male offenders (6.3%). While over half (53.1%) of the male homicide offenders most recent incident was within a year of the homicide compared to only 15.0% of the homicides committed by females.

Table 4. History of Violence in the Relationship

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Female Abused Year Prior to Homicide	80.0 (20)	87.2 (41)
% Female Not Abused Year Prior to Homicide	20.0 (5)	12.8 (6)
% Offender Was First to Use or Threaten to Use Physical Violence in Relationship	5.0 (1)	87.9 (29)
% Victim Was First to Use or Threaten to Use Physical Violence in Relationship	95.0 (19)	12.1 (4)
% Offender Ever Injured by Victim	65.0 (13)	12.5 (4)
% Offender Never Injured by Victim	35.0 (7)	87.5 (28)
% Most Recent Incident Was Same Day or Within 24 Hours of Homicide	15.0 (3)	6.3 (2)
% Most Recent Incident Was Same Week but Not the Same Day	40.0 (8)	18.8 (6)
% Most Recent Incident Was in the Same Month, But Not the Same Week	30.0 (6)	21.9 (7)
% Most Recent Incident Earlier Same Year or Within 12 Months of the Homicide	15.0 (3)	53.1 (17)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

*Other Violent Incidents in the Relationship*

Information regarding whether or not the offender had ever slapped the victim or pushed, grabbed or shoved them was missing for eight of the female offenders and six of the male offenders. Among those offenders whom information was available for, males were more apt to slap, push, grab or shove the victim (81.4%) than females, however, female offenders often did so as well. This was also the case with choking the victim; however it occurred just under half of the time. Information regarding the offender ever choking the victim was missing for ten female offenders and fourteen male offenders. In

contrast, female offenders were more likely to throw something at their victim than male offenders (missing for nine female offenders and ten male offenders), hit the victim with an object that could injure (missing for nine female offenders and eleven male offenders), and beat the victim up (missing for six male offenders and eight female offenders).

Information regarding whether or not the offender had ever threatened to or used a knife on the victim was missing for thirteen female offenders and fifteen male offenders. Among offenders with information, many more female offenders threatened or used a knife on their victim than male offenders. Likewise, a higher proportion of female offenders actually injured their victim with the knife (missing for twenty female offenders and thirty-six male offenders). In contrast, male offenders were more than twice as likely to threaten to or use a gun on their victim (missing for eleven male offenders and eleven female offenders) and had actually injured the victim with a gun seventy-five times more often than female offenders. However, this number is only based on two female offenders and twelve male offenders.

Table 5. Other Violent Incidents in the Relationship

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender Ever Throw Anything at Victim	64.7 (11)	51.3 (20)
% Offender Never Threw Anything at Victim	35.3 (6)	48.7 (19)
% Offender Ever Pushed, Grabbed or Shoved Victim	77.8 (14)	81.4 (35)
% Offender Never Pushed, Grabbed or Shoved Victim	22.2 (4)	18.6 (8)
% Offender Ever Slap the Victim	66.7 (12)	81.4 (35)
% Offender Never Slapped the Victim	33.3 (6)	18.6 (8)
% Offender Ever Hit Victim With an Object that Could Injure	70.6 (12)	50.0 (19)
% Offender Never Hit Victim With an Object that Could Injure	29.4 (5)	50.0 (19)
% Offender Ever Beat the Victim Up	55.6 (10)	40.5 (17)
% Offender Never Beat the Victim Up	44.4 (8)	59.5 (25)
% Offender Ever Choke the Victim	43.8 (7)	48.6 (17)
% Offender Never Choked the Victim	56.3 (9)	51.4 (18)
% Offender Ever Threatened/Used a Knife on Victim	61.5 (8)	41.2 (14)
% Offender Never Threatened/Used a Knife on Victim	38.5 (5)	58.8 (20)
% Offender Ever Injure Victim with a Knife	66.7 (4)	38.5 (5)
% Offender Never Injured Victim with a Knife	33.3 (2)	61.5 (8)
% Offender Ever Threatened/Used a Gun on Victim	13.3 (2)	31.6 (12)
% Offender Never Threatened/Used a Gun on Victim	86.7 (13)	68.4 (26)
% Offender Ever Injure the Victim With a Gun	0.0 (0)	75.0 (9)
% Offender Never Injured the Victim with a Gun	100 (2)	25.0 (3)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

### *The Final Incident*

With regard to who initiated the violence in the final incident was missing for one male offender. More often than not it was the male initiating the violence, whether he was the offender (95.8%) or the victim (69.2%). Information with regard to jealousy being an issue in the final incident was missing for one male offender and one female offender. For those for whom information was available, the final incident involved jealousy by the offender in over one fourth of the male offender cases and slightly less often in female offender cases (16.0%), while jealousy on the part of the victim was much lower for male offenders (6.4%) than for female offenders (12.0%). Information regarding infidelity being an issue in the final incident was missing for five male offenders and six female offenders. For those for whom information was available, more male offender cases involved the offender suspecting his victim of being unfaithful (25.5%), than female offenders believing the same of their victims (16.0%), while the male victims of female offenders were almost twice as likely to feel that infidelity was taking place. Information with regard to whether or not anyone was trying to leave in the final incident was missing for one of the male offenders and three of the female offenders. For those for whom information was available, the victim trying to leave in the final incident was more than twice as likely to occur when the male was the offender (27.7%) than when the female was the offender (13.0%). The male wanting back into the relationship was almost twice as likely to occur with male offenders as female offenders. Information regarding whether or not the proxies or offenders felt that the offender meant to kill the victim was missing for three of the male offenders and thirteen of the female

offenders. Among the cases in which information was available, just over half of the male offenders (56.5%) meant to kill their victim while only 15.4% of the female offenders meant to do so.

Table 6. The Final Incident

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender Initiated Violence in Final Incident	30.8 (18)	95.8 (46)
% Victim Initiated Violence in Final Incident	69.2 (8)	4.2 (2)
% No One Trying to Leave in Final Incident	69.6 (16)	57.4 (27)
% Woman Wanted to Leave in Final Incident	8.7 (2)	27.7 (13)
% Male Wanted to Leave in Final Incident	13.0 (3)	0.0 (0)
% Male Wanted Back Into the Relationship in Final Incident	8.7 (2)	14.9 (7)
% Jealousy was Not an Issue in Final Incident	72.0 (18)	68.1 (32)
% Male Jealous of Female in Final Incident	12.0 (3)	25.5 (12)
% Female Jealous of Male in Final Incident	16.0 (4)	6.4 (3)
% Infidelity Was Not an Issue in Final Incident	70.0 (14)	68.2 (30)
% Male Suspected Female of Being Unfaithful in Final Incident	20.0 (4)	6.8 (3)
% Female Suspected Male of Being Unfaithful in Final Incident	10.0 (2)	25.0 (11)
% Offender Meant to Kill Victim	15.4 (2)	56.5 (26)
% Thought the Offender Meant to Kill Victim, But Not Sure	15.4 (2)	8.7 (4)
% Offender Did Not Mean to Kill Victim, But Not Sure	69.2 (9)	34.8 (16)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

### *Weapon Use*

Information with regards to the offenders having guns in the home was missing for a majority of the offenders (twenty female and thirty-three male). Among the cases

for which information was available, male offenders were almost four times more likely to have guns in their home. All of the information was available with regard to the weapon the homicide offender used to kill their victim. Male offenders used more of a variety of weapons; 36.8% of them used a gun, 26.5% used a knife, 20.4% strangled the female offender, and 16.3% used a different weapon; in contrast, female offenders generally only used two types of weapons; knives (76.9%) and guns (19.2%).

Table 7. Weapon Use

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender had Guns in Their Home	16.7 (1)	62.5 (10)
% Offender Did Not Have Guns in the Home	83.3 (5)	37.5 (6)
% Gun Used in Final Incident	19.2 (5)	36.8 (18)
% Knife Used in Final Incident	76.9 (20)	26.5 (13)
% Strangulation Used in Final Incident	0.0 (0)	20.4 (10)
% Other Weapon Used in Final Incident	3.8 (1)	16.3 (8)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

### *Suicide*

With regard to the offender committing suicide during the final incident, male offenders were more than three times as likely to do so as female offenders. While 14.7% of the male offenders had been known to have tried to commit suicide in the past, none of the female offenders had been known to attempt to do so; however, information was missing for eleven female offenders and fifteen male offenders.

Table 8. Suicide

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender Committed Suicide after Final Incident	3.8 (1)	14.3 (7)
% Offender Attempted to Commit Suicide at the Scene	0.0 (0)	4.1 (2)
% Offender Attempted to Commit Suicide, But Not at the Scene	0.0 (0)	2.0 (1)
% Offender Never Attempted to Commit Suicide After Final Incident	96.2 (25)	79.6 (39)
% Offender Ever Attempt Suicide in Past	0.0 (0)	14.7 (5)
% Offender Never Attempted Suicide in Past	100 (15)	85.3 (29)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

### The Criminal Justice Response

Information regarding whether or not the offender was violent outside of the home was missing for nine of the female offenders and twelve of the male offenders. Among the cases where information was available, male offenders were often more violent outside of the home. Male offenders had prior arrests 73.0% of the time while female offenders had prior arrests 50.0% of the time. However, this information was missing for twelve of the male offenders and sixteen of the female offenders.

Information with regard to what those prior arrests were for was missing for twenty-one female offenders and twenty-two male offenders. Among the cases where information was available, male offenders were more than twice as likely to have been arrested for previous domestic incidents, while female offenders were almost twice as likely to have

been arrested for a non-violent crime against a person. Information regarding whether or not the female offender or victim had ever contacted the police previously for a domestic incident was missing for five female offenders and eight male offenders. Among those offenders with information, 66.6% of the female offenders had contacted, or sometimes had contacted the police for previous domestic incidents with their partners, while 43.9% of the male offender's victims had done so.

Information regarding whether or not the offender was arrested by the police for the final incident was missing for two of the male offenders. Police made arrests almost equally between male and female offenders; however, non-arrests were higher for female offenders (15.4%) than male offenders (4.3%). This may be due to the high number of male offenders who died at the scene (17.0%) or perhaps the understanding that the female may have been defending herself due to the number of times she had previously contacted the police (57.1%). The information regarding what the offender had been charged with was missing for eight female offenders and sixteen male offenders. Male offenders were charged with homicide, murder, or first degree murder nearly three fourths of the time (66.7%), while female offenders were charged with the same crime less than half of the time (44.4%). However, female offenders were charged with manslaughter or second degree murder three times more than male offenders were. Information regarding what the offender was found guilty of was missing for seventeen female offenders and twenty-three male offenders. Male offenders were found guilty of homicide, murder, or first degree murder much more often (76.9%) than female offenders (22.2%), while female offenders were found guilty of the lesser charge of manslaughter

or second degree murder nearly six times as often as male offenders.

Table 9. The Criminal Justice Response

	Female Offenders	Male Offenders
% Offender Believed to be Violent Outside of the Home	35.3 (6)	59.5 (22)
% Offender Not Believed to be Violent Outside of the Home	64.7 (11)	40.5 (15)
% Offender Ever Been Arrested	50.0 (5)	73.0 (27)
% Offender Never Been Arrested	50.0 (5)	27.0 (10)
% Offender's Arrest Was For Domestic Violence	20.0 (1)	40.7 (11)
% Offender's Arrest Was For a Different Violent Crime Against a Person	20.0 (1)	33.3 (9)
% Offender's Arrest Was For a Different Crime	50.0 (3)	25.9 (7)
% Female Ever Contacted Police Previously For Domestic Incidents	57.1 (12)	41.5 (17)
% Female Never Contacted Police Previously For Domestic Incidents	33.4 (7)	56.1 (23)
% Female Sometimes Contacted Police Previously For Domestic Incidents	9.5 (2)	2.4 (1)
% Offender Arrested For Final Incident	80.8 (21)	78.7 (37)
% Offender Not Arrested For Final Incident Because They Died at the Scene	3.8 (1)	17.0 (8)
% Offender Not Arrested For Final Incident	0.0 (0)	4.3 (2)
% Offender Only Questioned at the Scene of the Final Incident	15.4 (4)	0.0 (0)
% Offender Charged With Homicide, Murder, or First Degree Murder	44.4 (8)	66.7 (22)
% Offender Charged With Manslaughter or Second Degree Murder	27.8 (5)	9.1 (3)
% Offender Charged With Involuntary Manslaughter	0.0 (0)	9.1 (3)
% Offender Charged With Justifiable Homicide	5.6 (1)	0.0 (0)
% Offender Charged With Other	22.2 (4)	15.1 (5)
% Offender Found Guilty of Homicide, Murder, or First Degree Murder	22.2 (2)	76.9 (20)
% Offender Found Guilty of Manslaughter or Second Degree Murder	66.7 (6)	11.5 (3)
% Offender Found Guilty of Involuntary Manslaughter	11.1 (1)	11.5 (3)

Note: Numbers in ( ) are the number of offenders for whom information was available

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to ascertain whether or not male and female intimate partner homicide offenders differ on a variety of characteristics. With regard to age discrepancy between intimate partner homicide offenders and their victims, this study found similar results to that of Block (1995). According to the charged narrative, 47.4% of cases had greater than a five year gap between the ages of the couple involved, with the greatest gap being the male victim being five to nine years older than the female offender (17.9%), followed by the male victim being 10 to 19 years older (10.0%).

With regard to race, 92.3% of the female offenders were black and although there was more diversity amongst male offenders, a vast majority of them were black (71.4%) as well. The research literature suggests race may be an important risk factor because this may be a characteristic, however, as mentioned previously, due to the low sample size, it is impossible to run any tests of significance to see if it is the color of the offender's skin that is the factor or if it is their race combined with their socioeconomic status that puts them at risk for killing their intimate partner. Another issue that must be addressed with regard to race is where this sample was drawn from. Chicago has a higher black population than more rural communities, therefore, the sample may not be representative of all intimate partner homicides.

The results from this study are similar to that of previous research (Goetting, 1989; Roberts, 1996) regarding the education level of intimate partner homicide offenders. A majority of male offenders were lacking a high school education (78.4%),

as were 71.5% of the female offenders. This low education level appears to play more of a part in the female offender's employment than the male offenders, as almost twice as many female offenders were unemployed. These results are slightly less than that of Goetting's (1989) with regard to the unemployment level of women who kill their intimate partner, and much lower than that for male offenders. The results of this study, although limited by the small sample size, and a number of offender and proxies that did not have any information, implies that low education level, low income and utilization of public assistance may be a characteristic of those women that kill their intimate partner.

Although it was not mentioned in previous research, this study found the length of the relationship to be an important characteristic in intimate partner homicide, 82.5% of the male offenders and 83.3% of the female offenders had been in their relationship for over a year. Although the results regarding the length of the relationship are limited due to not knowing if the offender and victim were together just one year or ten years, the overall results show that the longer a couple is in a relationship, it may factor into whether or not he/she kills their intimate partner. The status of the relationship at the time of the homicide with regard to female offenders was highest in common-law partner's (34.6%) while male offenders killed their ex- or former girlfriend 32.7% of the time. Like previous research (Wilson & Daly, 1994), this study found a high number of female offenders either trying to exit the relationship or wanting the male victim to stay away at the time of the homicide. However, that does not appear to be a characteristic for male offenders.

Similar to previous research (Blount, Silverman, Sellers, & Seese, 1994, Mann, 1988), this study found alcohol to play a role in intimate partner homicide. Overall, alcohol consumption was higher for male offenders than for female offenders, however, alcohol use during the incident was higher for female offenders than for male offenders. In contrast, drug use during the incident was higher for male offenders than for female offenders. Although alcohol abuse is not as high among offenders in this study compared to previous research (Blount et al., 1994; Browne, 1987; Walker, 1984), it definitely is a defining characteristic for both male and female offenders.

The findings of this study with regard to having children in the home were similar to that of Mann (1988). This study found that 65.4% of the women who had killed their intimate partner had children in the home. Most children were the female offender's but not the male victim's. Although the abuse of the child by the male victim was not addressed in this study, previous research (Gauthier & Bankston, 2004; O'Keefe, 1997) has found that female offenders are often trying to protect the children in the home when she kills her intimate partner. Future research needs to decipher whether or not the child is being abused in the home, who is doing the abusing and who the biological parents are in order to find out if there is indeed a link between children in the home and intimate partner violence.

Similar to previous research (Gillespie, 1989, Smith Moracco & Butts, 1998), this study found violence in the home greatly impacts both male and female intimate partner homicide offending. The difference between males and female however, is that the male offender's violence appears to be to control the female (Polk & Ranson, 1991: Rasche,

1993), while the female offender's violence is defensive and out of fear (Browne, 1987). This study found that 46.3% of the male offenders were known to control their female victim's daily activities, while only 18.8% of the female offenders were known to do the same. With regard to other controlling characteristics, such as jealousy and threatening behaviors, both male and female offenders were found to use the behaviors, however, the percentages were consistently higher with male offenders. The only controlling behavior that female offenders used slightly more than male offenders was limiting the victim's contact with family and friends. With regard to previous abuse and controlling behaviors in the relationship, this study was limited by the way some of the questions were asked. For instance, offenders and proxies were asked if a behavior ever happened or it never happened, so those who responded ever could have been once or ten times. Perhaps future research should not restrict the possible answers in order to distinguish the actual number of times the event occurred.

The most gender defining characteristic found in this study is that of prior abuse in the relationship; male offenders were more often the aggressors, while female offenders were defending themselves. The results from this study are similar to previous research by Jurik and Winn (1990) with regard to abuse in the relationship prior to the homicide. The majority of male offenders had abused their female victim and 80.0% of the female offenders had been abused by their male victim. Males were found to initiate violence in the final incident as well as prior fights more often than the female, whether they were the victim or the offender. This is similar to previous research (Browne, 1987) with regard to female offenders being afraid of their male partner and simply trying to

protect themselves when they commit the homicide. Female offenders in this study were injured during previous incidents with their male victims more often than the male offenders were injured by the female victims, and their injuries tended to be more severe. Female offenders were more than two and a half times as likely to commit the homicide within 24 hours of an abusive incident while male offenders were more than three times as likely to do so up to a year after the last abusive incident. Therefore future research needs to address victim precipitation. Many of the women who kill their intimate partner have been terrorized for some period of time before they kill their batterer, while that does not appear to be the case for male offenders. More interviews need to be conducted with these offenders to discover what exactly happened in the days prior to the homicide.

With regard to the offender's weapon of choice in the homicide, this study was not consistent with previous research (Goetting, 1987; Mann, 1996; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987). For instance, the female offenders in this study used a knife to kill their significant other the majority of the time. In contrast, Wilbanks (1987) found women used a knife only 25% of the time. Male offenders in this study used a gun 36.8% of the time, a knife 26.5% of the time, and strangled their female victim 20.4% of the time. These percentages were not consistent with research by Silverman and Mukherjee's (1987), which found gun use among male offenders occurring 16.7% of the time and strangulation 14.3% of the time. These differences in the offender's weapon of choice corroborate Wolfgang's (1958) theory of women using a weapon that they are familiar with due to household chores. The alarmingly high percentage of male offenders who choose to strangle their victim shows the viciousness of the attack, which validates the

idea that male offenders may indeed be killing in order to be in control. Future research could address these differences to see if females are using kitchen knives to defend themselves during an attack because that is the first weapon they find, whereas male offenders may be using a variety of weapons because they never know when they will feel a loss of control and the need to try to gain it back.

The results of this study were similar to that of previous research (Block & Christakos, 1995; Easteal, 1994; Lund & Smorodinsky, 2001) with regard to the uniqueness of male offenders committing suicide after they kill their intimate partner. Male offenders were almost four times as likely to kill themselves after the homicide as female offenders, and 14.7% of the male offenders had tried to kill themselves in the past, whereas none of the female offenders had done so. Previous research has found that the motive behind the suicide may be a result of the homicide offender and their victim being elderly and wanting to die together (Lund & Smorodinsky, 2001). This study did not address that issue; however, future research should not ignore this possible cause. Lund and Smorodinsky (2001) also addressed race and weapon use in their research. They found that many of the male intimate homicide offenders who committed suicide were white and had used a gun to kill their partner. Due to the fact that the majority of the male offenders in this study were black and used a variety of weapons to kill their partner, there is a possibility that the suicidal tendencies of male intimate partner homicide offenders may be more common if the sample being studied is more racially diverse. This study also found that another possible characteristic that needs to be addressed with regard to suicide is the possibility that the male offender simply can't live

without their partner, and if they can't have them than no one can. For instance, well over half of the female offenders in this study had tried to leave or asked the male victim to leave prior to the homicide. Regardless of the suicidal motive, the deliberate act of trying to take ones own life needs to be researched further with regard to intimate partner homicide, so that perhaps women that are in a relationship with a suicidal mate can be educated as to what the overall repercussions may be.

Similar to previous research by Hamilton and Sutterfield (1998), this study found that half of the women had contacted the police in the past for previous domestic disputes with the partner they had killed. However, unlike previous research (Hamilton & Sutterfield, 1998), this study found a much higher percentage of prior arrests for domestic violence for males who had been killed by their intimate partner and had the police respond to prior domestic disputes. This implies that previous abuse is a defining characteristic for intimate partner homicide and needs to be addressed in the criminal justice system. Police officers need better training on how to deal with domestic violence and criminal courts need to either mandate harsher sentences or require abusers to undergo lengthy counseling to make them more aware and accountable for their actions. With regard to arrests, female offenders were actually arrested more often for the homicide than male offenders, however, male offenders were found guilty of homicide, murder, or first degree murder almost three and a half times more often than female offenders, while female offenders received lesser sentences more often than males. These findings were consistent with Goetting's (1989) research, however, not with research by Stout (1991). The harsher sentencing of male homicide offenders in this

study may be due to the fact that nearly three fourths of their previous arrests were for a violent crime against a person. Although the criminal justice system appears to be taking into consideration prior abuse in their relationships as well as previous contact with criminal courts when they are sentencing male and female intimate partner homicide offenders, further research and training needs to address this abuse between intimates before it escalates into homicide.

This study found numerous differences in the characteristics of male and female intimate partner homicide offenders, with the greatest differences being prior abuse in the relationship, weapon use, sentencing, and suicide. These findings, along with everything previously mentioned throughout this study will greatly benefit the criminal justice system as well as organizations that deal with intimate partner abuse. Distinguishing the differences between why males and females kill their intimate partner will allow the criminal justice system as well as organizations that deal with domestic violence to provide better training to those that come in contact with abused women as well as male abusers. The more people understand the cycle of abuse, the better the chances of teaching it to those that need it the most.

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