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“I’m hoping for a miracle” and “I am too”:

Hopes Expressed Between Victims and Offenders Following Detention for  
Domestic Violence

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### Abstract

We used a phenomenological qualitative approach to examine hopes expressed between domestic violence victims and offenders during the especially fragile time immediately following the offender's detention. Audio-recorded telephone conversations of 17 couples were analyzed (up to 120 minutes of conversational data for each couple), using a lexical definition of hope as the starting point. Data analysis began with the generation of narrative summaries, followed by the thematic identification and coding of expressed hopes within each relationship.

Several hopes were expressed consistently by victims and offenders. The most consistent hope was the desire for love to be known and reciprocated. These hopes were complicated, however, by real or imagined threats to the fidelity of their relationship and concerns about the ability to overcome relational conflict. In addressing these concerns, partners expressed hope for explanations of truth about controversial behavior, change in future behavior, and personal exoneration from blame. Emotionally-charged discussions, regarding relationship turmoil, occasionally entailed victims and offenders expressing a desire to end the relationship. Vacillations in the desire to maintain the relationship, however, were temporal in nature, with couples returning to expressions of love, a desire for sympathy or help, and hope for the offender's release. These findings advance an understanding of the dynamics of violent couples and the complex emotional experience following a severe violent event. As a collective process, even when heated discussions about ending the relationship and disagreements about change or blame occurred, couples commonly still returned to expressions of love, and hope for the offender's release.

**Keywords: domestic violence, family violence, hope, couple and family processes**

### **Background**

Domestic violence impacts an estimated 25% of U.S. women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). While domestic violence accounts for a multitude of physical and emotional complications (Bhargava et al., 2011; Bonomi et al., 2009; Bonomi, Anderson, Rivara, & Thompson, 2007; Campbell et al., 2003; Cokkinides, Coker, Sanderson, Addy, & Bethea, 1999; Kernic, Wolf, & Holt, 2000; McFarlane, Parker, Soeken, & Bullock, 1992), many women endure abuse over a period of years (Thompson et al., 2006) and typically make multiple attempts to leave an abusive relationship (Koepsell, Kernic, & Holt, 2006).

Studies have attempted to explain how and why violent relationships are maintained, and several theories have been set forth, including the prevalence of less secure adult attachment orientations (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) within violent partnerships (Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008; Bond & Bond, 2004; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005), lack of differentiation of self among partners (Bartle & Rosen, 1994), and strong attachment bonds emerging from power imbalances coupled with intermittent periods of abuse followed by stable periods (Dutton & Painter, 1981). Other studies have examined variables that serve as obstacles for departing from violent relationships, such as financial instability (Gelles, 1976; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Strube & Barbour, 1983) and unsuccessful attempts to access social support services (Koepsell et al., 2006).

Walker (1979) significantly contributed to the literature on domestic violence by identifying the cyclical pattern with which violence occurs and reoccurs in intimate relationships. Walker described three phases of the abuse experience: 1) a succession of less severe battering

events that build in intensity and lead to an accumulation of tension within the relationship; 2) the discharge of escalating tension through an acute violent event that results in significant harm; and 3) the cessation of violence replaced by increased affection, extreme kindness, or promises of change from the aggressor who indicates remorse (Walker, 1979). Through repeated exposure to uncontrollable trauma, victims develop a sense of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) or a feeling/belief of personal powerlessness to affect more positive future outcomes. The diminished belief in one's own ability to stop the abuse leads to a reduction in the victim's active efforts to effect change, a vulnerability towards depression and anxiety, and contributes to the maintenance of the violent relationship (Walker, 1979).

Abramson and colleagues (1989) reframed the theory of learned helplessness and depression (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) by identifying two components of a generalized expectation of *hopelessness* that contribute to a specific subtype of depression: 1) high perceived likelihood of significant adverse future outcomes and 2) perceived helplessness in eliciting more favorable outcomes. In applying the hopelessness theory (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989) to partner violence, Clements and colleagues (2004) found that victims who reported higher anticipated control over the future occurrence of violence (i.e., they felt they could influence outcomes) indicated less hopelessness and dysphoria than women who anticipated little personal control over future violence.

Marden & Rice (1995) additionally proposed that hope may serve as a coping mechanism for victims' experiences of cognitive dissonance—the psychological term for holding conflicting cognitions—that increases during the tension building and violent phase of abuse. Using victims' personal accounts, Marden & Rice (1995) documented the role of hope for victims over time and across different phases of the abuse experience (Walker, 1979). Specifically, in the

tension-building phase (Walker, 1979), victims retrospectively discussed hope serving as “*something to cling to,*” or cope with, as the offender’s violent tendencies resurfaced (Marden & Rice, 1995, p. 75). Upon the eruption of a severe violent event (Walker, 1979), generalized feelings of hopelessness or an adherence to false, unrealistic hopes were recalled. Lastly, in the phase of extreme kindness and contrition on behalf of the offender (Walker, 1979), victims reported that hope served to foster the belief that their partner would change, to endure or survive in the violent relationship, or to remain in denial regarding the reality of the abuse (Marden & Rice, 1995).

An aspect of hope in violent partnerships, however, that has not been explored, to date, is the communication of hope between victims and offenders, immediately following a violent event that may contribute to the re-stabilization or dissolution of the relationship. The present study examined audio-recorded telephone conversations between victims and offenders during the offender’s detainment to identify expressed hopes by both victims and offenders; for the analysis, a lexical definition of hope was used: “*a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen*” or a “*want (for) something to happen or be the case*” (Hope, 2010). To date, only a few studies have utilized real-time conversational data between couples—in the absence of a study interviewer—to gain further understanding of partner violence. These studies include a specific examination of the processes associated with victim recantation (Bonomi, Gangamma, Locke, Katafiasz, & Martin, 2011), triggers of violence (Nemeth, Bonomi, Lee, & Ludwin, 2012), and the use of minimizations to maintain the relationship (Lee, Bonomi, Carotta, & Nemeth, in preparation). No study has yet explored the phenomenon of expressed hopes between partners, during the especially fragile time immediately following a violent event. The identification of hopes conveyed by victims and offenders provides additional insight into the

emotional experiences that contribute to the restoration or dissolution of violent partnerships, following partner incarceration for severe violence.

### Methods

Study procedures were approved by The Ohio State University's Institutional Review Board. Audio-recorded telephone conversations were obtained from 17 heterosexual couples, during the male partners' detention for felony-level domestic violence at a Washington State detention facility (Bonomi et al., 2011). The sample size was devised to achieve data saturation, where no new themes were identified (Giacomini & Cook, 2000). As described in previous publications, the detention facility records all calls made by detainees (Bonomi et al., 2011; Nemeth et al., 2012); this practice was upheld in a Washington State Supreme Court decision (**State v. Modica**: 164 Wash.2d. 186 P. 3d 1062, Wash. July 10, 2008, NO. 79767-6). Tapes between offenders and their victim were provided to the study team for analysis, by a Washington State Detention Facility and the prosecuting attorney's office, who has the authority to release the audio-tapes for research purposes (Bonomi et al., 2011). Calls made from the detention facility are subject to public disclosure laws; as such, subjects were not required to give informed consent.

The data analysis occurred as follows. Consistent with a phenomenological approach to the qualitative data analysis—where initial parameters are established a priori around the particular “phenomenon” of interest—we began with the lexical definition of hope: “*a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen*” or a “*want (for) something to happen or be the case*” (Hope, 2010). Using the lexical definition of hope, from January 2012-March 2012, in a preliminary analysis, the first and second author (CC & ML) iteratively listed to audio-taped conversations, recorded hopes expressed by victims and offenders, and wrote



narrative summaries for each couple to reflect themes within each relationship. Bi-monthly meetings and de-identified electronic correspondence occurred during this time to discuss observations, themes, and directions for further inquiry. During analysis, nuances within the lexical definition of hope were considered; for example, stated fears/anxiety about the future were considered as an extension/reversal of the definitional component concerning a “*want for something to NOT be the case.*” From March 2012-April 2012, the lead author (CC) examined the narrative summaries; based on this in-depth examination, a coding scheme was devised, comprising fifteen categories of hope and supporting exemplars.

After a list of agreed-upon categories was developed, to ensure systematic observation and continuity of interpretations, the first author (CC) led a team of four coders (CC, ML, JS, SB) in double-coding the first two conversations for each of the 17 couples, which included listening and coding approximately 30 minutes of conversation for each couple. The team of coders met weekly as a group for ten weeks, from April 2012-June 2012, to discuss and refine emergent themes, including making revisions to the coding scheme; oversight was provided in the initial three meetings, and on an ongoing basis by electronic correspondence, by the project’s principal investigator (AB). After double-coding each couple’s first two conversations and refining hope categories, each of the coders coded the conversations of four to six couples independently; this amounted to up to approximately 120 minutes of conversation for each couple. After this comprehensive coding process, a summative table was generated to denote hope expressions and supporting quotes from all victims and offenders. All interpretations were further discussed and refined when necessary by the first three authors (CC, ML, AB) during the preparation of the manuscript.

## Results

Several universal hopes—again, defined as “*a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen*” or a “*want (for) something to happen or be the case*” (Hope, 2010)—were expressed consistently by victims and offenders. These included hopes related to 1) loving and being loved; 2) a desire for truth, change, and exoneration from blame; 3) temporal requests to end the relationship; 4) and appeals for sympathy, help, and the offender’s release from incarceration (Figure 1).

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### Hopes Related to Loving and Being Loved

The most consistent theme for both victims and offenders were hopes related to loving and being loved. These included three subthemes—a desire for love and care to be known, a desire for the relationship to be maintained, and hope for a partner’s reciprocation of these desires.

**Hope that love is known.** The most commonly expressed hope for both victims and offenders was the desire for their partner to know that they still cared despite the violent episode and the physical separation posed by the offender’s incarceration. For example, one victim, who was punched in the stomach and strangled, told the offender that she had been crying since his arrest. When the offender later questioned if he was the primary problem in their relationship, the victim responded: “*You’re not a problem. I love you and I will always love you.*” She

further emphasized, *“I love you for who you are.”* These expressions of care were mutual between victims and offenders and typically began to occur in the first or second conversation.

**Hope of maintaining the relationship.** Offenders and victims also commonly expressed a hope of maintaining their relationship; one offender stated:

*“You could do everything in the world to me and I would still come back to you, anything, because my love is unconditional. If I went to prison for 10 years, I’m still gonna’ call you. I wouldn’t care who you were talking to or anything like that. I would still want to be in your world and I would still want you to be in mine.... I hope I found my person I can settle with for a long time.”*

Offenders’ hope of staying together included requests for the victim and/or children to visit, and an expressed desire for the victim’s continued or increased commitment to their relationship; for example:

*“Here you are my woman ... you’re my wife really ... I’m gonna’ quit that, and we need to quit saying that. You’re not my fiancé. You’re my wife and I’m your husband. You know, period, bottom line. We done been through too much at this point, and we aint turning around. We aint walkin away from each other. This is our relationship. This is what we got. And we’re fixin’ to marry each other, and we’re gonna’ make it happen, and we’re gonna’ be happy together.”*

Victims also commonly voiced a desire to remain together and made pledges to wait for their partner’s release, for example:

*“If you truly ever loved me, and if you still love me, when you leave (jail), and you really want to have a relationship with someone ... I don’t mean just say I love you, and just drop in and out ... if you truly want a wife, a woman, someone to love you and care about you ... when all of this is said and done, than you look for me, and I will be here.”*

**Hope for the reciprocation of love.** Victims’ and offenders’ expressions of love and desire to remain together were accompanied by hope that their partner feels the same, but also fear and anxiety that they may not. This was a particularly strong theme for victims who expressed concern that the offender’s hope of being together and expressions of love were simply “jail talk,” driven only by the offender’s desire for the victim to recant her story in court. Victims additionally voiced difficulty reconciling the offender’s expressions of love with his violent behaviors:

V: *“Why did you do that to me?”*

O: *“Cause I’m stupid, cause I was drunk, and cause I was upset, angry about a lot of things. You know, and there’s no excuse for what I did. I’m sorry baby.”*

V: *“Why don’t you love me?”*

O: *“I do love you, boobo. You don’t believe that?”*

V: *“I don’t know why you would ever do that to me.”*

O: *“Kay, I’m gonna’ go. Ok, boobo?”*

V: *“No, no, no, no. Please don’t go, baby. I’m sorry.”*

Offenders’ hope for reciprocation of love entailed concern that the victim would abandon her commitment to couple’s relationship or make efforts to extend his incarceration. An offender’s specific request for reassurance is included here:

O: *“Do you love me? How come you don’t tell me you love me?”*

V: *“Yes I do.”*

O: *“You never say it to me though.”*

### **Hope for Truth, Change, and Exoneration from Blame**

Hope of loving and being loved were further complicated by real or imagined threats of infidelity and concerns about the ability to overcome relationship conflict. In addressing these concerns, partners mutually expressed hope for explanations of truth about controversial behavior, change of future behavior, and personal exoneration from blame.

**Hope for truth.** Victims and offenders demonstrated a common desire for their partner’s honesty regarding past or current behavior, particularly regarding extra-relationship affairs and drug/alcohol use. One offender pressed his victim about her work activities and obligations during his incarceration: *“Why’d I call at noon and no one answered?... What were you doing at lunch that was so important?”* The victim shared that she had to attend a work-related gathering, and the offender interrogated further: *“I take it you’re going to be doing more of these little events, right? ... What time is this event over tonight? ... What are you doing tonight after that?”* Victims, too, pressed for truth about their partner’s behavior, commonly questioning drug use and possible infidelity:

V: *“T, exactly who did you cheat on me with? Honestly, just tell me the truth.”*

O: *“What?”*

V: *“Tell me the truth about who you, who did you ch-ch-cheat on me with.”*

O: *“With one person and I told you. No, I didn’t tell you.”*

Offenders additionally requested to know the truth about information victims shared with friends/family, law enforcement, or other court officials regarding the violent event and their relationship in general—including challenging the victim’s account. For instance, when one victim told her offender that she was unable to open her mouth wide enough to eat, he directly refuted her claims:

O: *“Nigga you, you’re this hurt but you’re helping people move? I don’t get that shit.”*

V: *(sounds angry) “Trying to keep myself busy.”*

O: *“Nigga, you’re helping people move and you’re that hurt ... I don’t get that shit.”*

V: *“It’s just some boxes.”*

O: *“Nigga, if you was really hurt like you said you were, nigga, you wouldn’t be moving shit, but a cig –”*

V: *“It’s been a week.”*

**Hope for change.** In addressing concerns regarding current and past relationship turmoil or life stressors, victims and offenders also consistently expressed hope for change. This included three subthemes: hope of bettering themselves as individuals; hope for partner change; and hope of improving their lives collectively.

**Victims.** Victims expressed hope of bettering themselves by continuing their education, obtaining employment, improving their income, discontinuing drug use, regaining or maintaining custody of children, and securing better housing. During these expressed hopes for improvement, victims conveyed agency and empowerment. One victim declared, *“My life is gonna’ be better because I’m going to make it better.”* Another victim insisted; *“I was trying to fuckin’ sign myself back into fuckin’ school ... I’m trying to get my GED right now and straighten my life right now without you. That’s the only thing I’m trying to do, take care of my son.”*

Victims also invoked agency in expressing a desire for their partner to change: *“If I have to put up with your rudeness and your attitude you better look cute, otherwise, you will be out the door.... (later) I’m in control this time around.”* In a subsequent conversation, the victim continued:

V: *“I can’t be with you if you are going to sit here and do drugs.”*

O: *“That is why I’m quitting.”*

V: *“I’m serious. I can’t go through that. It reminds me of my birthfather and I can’t have that ... [offender’s name], I was abused when I was younger.”*

While expressing hope for the offender to change, victims commonly offered pathways for how change might occur—including: the offender discontinuing drug or alcohol use; refraining from being around certain people; learning self control; taking responsibility for his violent behavior; being more respectful; and refraining from arguing or questioning her faithfulness. For example:

V: *“It is not ok what you did to me. You know that right?”*

O: *“Baby, I know ... I’m serious, I’m different. You know what I’m sayin’?”*

V: *“Are you?”*

O: *“Yeah, I’ve been sober for like over a week. That’s the longest I’ve ever been sober.”*

V: *“Can you be sober for the rest of your life?”*

O: *“Yeah, of course.”*

V: *“Are you staying away from fuckin’ [male name] and [male name]?”*

O: *“Yeah, yeah of course.”*

Victims also expressed hope that change would actually occur despite previous broken promises, and a hope that the offender has not, or would never be, violent towards the couple's children. After being tied up and badly beaten, one victim insisted: *"If you and me are going to be together after this ... we say that things are going to change every fucking time ... but I'm serious."* Victims' hopes regarding their partner's rehabilitation was not without concern, however, that change may be unattainable or require a higher spiritual force:

V: *"That's what the officer called you!"*

O: *"A sex offender?"*

V: *"A predator."*

O: *"Are you serious?"*

V: *"You prey on the weak, meaning me."*

O: *"Oh hell no."*

V: *"You use and abuse people like me ... and the only way to reform people like that is divine intervention and death."*

**Offenders.** In conversation with victims, offenders expressed hope and made promises of bettering themselves, which included: being more patient; being faithful; discontinuing drug or alcohol use; attending anger management classes; continuing their education; becoming more spiritual; and refraining from violence. One offender said: *"I wasn't a real man back then. Now nine days later, wow. I'm different now. I'm thinking clear, trying to move forward ... even if I sit (for) 28 months, I'm gonna' come out and love you even better, and that is a promise."* Later, the offender continued: *"I've had an experience. I've met a lot of cool people. I've had a lot of time to reflect upon myself, to be sober, think in a clear mind, and shit. I want to stay in the clear mind. I don't even want to smoke cigarettes when I get out."*



In addition to these expressed hopes for individual change, offenders also offered the victim hope for a better collective future—including intentions of obtaining a job, securing a better home for the couple, jointly maintaining a healthier lifestyle, and becoming more selective regarding social relationships. Other hopes included becoming a better partner, getting married or increasing their commitment, and fantasizing about engaging in enjoyable future activities together. Offenders also referenced seeking a higher spiritual power to evoke personal change: *“I’m going to do what I have to do [victim’s name]; I’m going to get saved.... I’m correcting everything about me.... I’ll be the perfect dad, and the perfect husband, for you and [child’s name].”*

Beyond their own promises for personal change, however, offenders also consistently expressed hope for the victim to make behavioral changes, including hope the victim would refrain from listening to the opinions of others, speak to him more kindly, stop arguing, refrain from raising her voice, or generally treat him differently. One offender suggested:

*“Stop arguing with me right now, please. I can’t afford this and neither can you.... You can tell me something without screaming at me and getting mad ... I would love for you to talk with me in a gentle voice ... your voice is so aggravating ... just talk to me like a woman and I will talk to you like a man.”*

Offenders additionally made requests for victims to ignore the opinions of others that threatened or created turmoil in their relationship. For example, one victim told her partner about his mother’s desire for the couple to end their relationship, the offender responded:

*“You and me aren’t going to make it if we keep listening to what other people say ... I still have faith in us no matter what you think, no matter what anyone else thinks.... You*

*think I care if my mom doesn't like you? ... It's about you and me making it, for [daughter's name] and for us."*

Offenders further expressed hope for victims to make behavioral changes with an emphasis on discontinuing drug use or behaving differently as a mother or a wife:

*"Why you doin' shit like this? Why you trying to just ruin somebody's life? ... You don't do nothing right. You don't do nothing right. You're a woman though. You won't do nothing right. You won't sit at home. You won't watch my daughter. You don't do nothing.... You keep aggravating a motherfucker to fight with you. You keep doin' it every fuckin' day.... What's wrong with you? ... Why can't you just act right? Why can't you just act right? What's the problem? Why can't you just be a woman? I don't get it. If you don't want to, just tell me. You want to be on the street. You want to live like this."*

**Hope for exoneration from blame.** Although intentions for personal change were expressed throughout conversations, victims and offenders also expressed hope of not being blamed for current turmoil within the relationship or its contributing factors. For example:

O: *"I just wished you'd took me home."*

V: *"Why would I take you home if you were swerving the car? ... I didn't want you in the car with me."*

O: *"No, but why did you have to drive me to the cops."*

V: *"You could have left. (O tries to interject). You don't leave me alone. You don't understand that."*

O: *"B, b, b, but I didn't do anything."*

V: *"Yah, you did."*

O: *"I was just sitting in the car waiting to go home."*

V: *"No. It's not my fault, [offender's name]."*

O: *"I know it's not. I just wish-*

V: *"I didn't do anything wrong".*

O: *"I just wish it didn't happen."*

V: *"The cops were there because of what you did. I didn't lie to them ... I didn't put you  
There. You put yourself there."*

Victims additionally resisted blame for the offender's pending charges, with some expressing hope that the offender knew his incarceration was not a result of a personal vendetta:

*"You can hate me. You can never speak to me again. You can whatever. Okay. This is not me getting back at you. This is not what this is about. What it's about is that ... I would just really like if your life got better, and you have to understand what you did. You have to understand it. I mean I don't think you understand it ... I forgave you and I have forgiven you, but there's a certain element that you don't understand what you do. And you know I've cried. I don't want you in jail but ... what you've done to me you haven't done that to nobody else. You don't sock nobody else in the stomach. You don't. You don't do what you've done to me."*

Victims further expressed hope of not being blamed for factors contributing to relationship turmoil, such as accusations of drug use, infidelity, or dishonesty.

Offenders most commonly expressed hope of not being blamed for the violent event or the victim's related stress, using minimizations, such as blaming the victim, challenging the

victim's account, citing the influence of drugs or alcohol, and downplaying the level of violence (Lee et al., in preparation). One offender highlighted multiple aspects of the victim's behavior that contributed to the violence:

*"When we go to court, um, I'm going to defend myself to a certain degree of, um, being in mutual conflict with you. I'm not always just the total aggressor. I didn't come over there and just provoke this. I didn't come over there that night and just jump on you."*

He later continued: *"I wasn't under any influence at all ... I was under the influence of you. It was a reaction. It was a total reaction to you.... But you weren't in your right frame of mind, right? You were drinking.... There was times when I just totally let my hands down and you hit on me."*

In another example, an offender attributed the violence to a mutual conflict problem within their relationship:

O: *"That's why we're stuck on the same shit. That's why we can't get passed this shit. Cause you sittin' there and not admittin' that you're a hater and that you want to keep see'n me in jail, because I'm not doin' right by you, or whatever it is. Right?"*

V: *"Nope"*

O: *"So, what is it then?... Soon as you figure it out though, then we can mother fuckin' get past it, because I'm not the mother-fuckin' problem. I try to solve it. The problem keeps coming back though ... so it's in you. So you got to come to more with yourself and admit your problem. I keep admitting my problem. I got an anger problem with hittin' motherfuckers.... Now what's your problem?"*

V: *"I got a problem with listenin' to people."*

O: *"No. You got a problem with what? Aggravating and starting shit. Right?"*

### **Hope of Ending the Relationship**

These emotionally-charged discussions, concerning both the desire to restabilize the relationship, yet the urgent need for truth, change and exoneration from blame, occasionally erupted in victims or offenders expressing a desire to end the relationship. The conflict between these two competing hopes—staying together or ending the relationship—is evidenced with the victim who stated: *"If you truly ever loved me, and if you still love me ... when all of this is said and done, than you look for me, and I will be here."* She later expressed:

*"I've always had feelings for you. It's just that I had to mentally tell my brain that it was through. And I'm unable to do that now, because I've been through all these things with you.... You're my friend. You're my lover. You're everything. And it's like no matter what's happened, I've tried to tell myself it's over, but I just can't do it. Every time I turn around ... I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel like somebody cast a spell on me or something ... I used to be able to just walk away, but I can't."*

The offender later responded with mutual affection and hope:

*"I love you, ok. I just want you to know that, alright? Don't think anything else. I love you more than all of this. And you know whatever happens, this is just one part of our lives, and we have, we have something that is everlasting, and this isn't the whole of it ... I want to get past this part to where we can enjoy things, so this is not how I see you, and*

*this is not how you see me. So, I mean, you have forgiven me and you know that means a lot to me.”*

Vacillations in the desire to continue the relationship were commonly transient in nature, however, with couples returning to expressions of love, a desire to remain together, and hope for the offender's release.

### **Hope of Sympathy, Help, & the Release from Incarceration**

Following incarceration for felony level violence, offenders typically appealed to their victim's sympathy and asked for specific help from the victim (Bonomi et al., 2011). Offenders most consistently wanted their partner to know how much they were suffering in jail: *“Well, I'm going more crazy than you are,”* and later, *“My blood pressure is hella high and shit ... I wiggled out ... I've been eating jail food.”* Another offender insisted:

*“You don't understand. I am facing real prison time, real prison time. I don't even wanna talk about, ok. It's gonna make me puke. It's gonna make me start puking, ok? Alright? You think life is rough? And you think you want to kill yourself. You don't even know what it's like to want to kill yourself ... I think about inhaling all of it every night.”*

Offenders' appeals for sympathy were often accompanied by voiced desires for release and ongoing pleas for the victim to help during incarceration (Bonomi et al., 2011). This included direct requests for the victim to recant, to contact lawyers, to drop no-contact orders, to obtain bail funds, or to send money and letters to the detention facility.

Victims also stated a desire for obtaining sympathy or understanding—with common reference to the severity of injuries sustained during the violent event or current elevated levels

of stress. Victims additionally expressed hope that offenders were aware of their efforts to provide assistance: “*That’s what I’m doing ... I’m waiting for a call back ... I’m trying okay. I’m doing my best.*” Victims’ efforts to provide assistance commonly included providing emotional support, monetary assistance, or taking direct legal actions to aid in the offender’s release.

### Discussion

Our study documented expressed hopes in domestic violence victims and offenders during the especially fragile time immediately following a violent event. The most consistent hopes expressed by victims and offenders were that love is known, maintained, and reciprocated. The hope of loving and being loved, however, were couched within real or imagined threats to the fidelity of their relationship and concerns about the ability to overcome past conflict. In addressing these concerns, partners mutually expressed hope for explanations of truth about controversial past behavior, for change in future behavior, and personal exoneration from blame. Most noteworthy, was victims’ expressed struggle to reconcile the relationship with the urgent hope for the offender to change his abusive behavior. These emotionally-charged discussions, regarding past and current relationship turmoil, occasionally entailed victims and offenders expressing a desire to end the relationship. The desire to end the relationship, however, was often temporal in nature, with couples returning to expressions of love, a desire for sympathy or help, and hope for a reduction in the offender’s detainment.

These findings provide valuable insight into the immediate experience of partners following felony level detainment for domestic violence, and are supported by existing literature. Both victims’ and offenders’ hope of love being known, and their fear that love is not

reciprocated, is consistent with literature suggesting that violent partnerships tend to involve high attachment/intimacy-related anxiety, which can include fear of losing a partner, or a desire for reassurance and closeness (Allison et al., 2008; Bond & Bond, 2004; Henderson et al., 2005). Our finding that victims and offenders hoped and probed for truth regarding their partner's past or current infidelity additionally supports Nemeth et al.'s (2012) findings that jealousy and threats of infidelity are predominant triggers for violence and an underlying stressor in violent couples.

Strong adherence and commitment to the violent partnership is further evidenced in both victim and offenders' expressed hope of maintaining the relationship. This mutual hope, coupled with offender's expressed love and promises for personal change, is supportive of Dutton and Painter's (1981) theory of traumatic bonding; Dutton's theory postulates that strong interpersonal bonds are formed in violent partnerships through intermittent periods of positive and negative interactions. Bartle and Rosen (1994) further suggested that interpersonal fusion in violent partnerships—characterized by lack of differentiation between partners—may contribute not only to a desire to remain together, but also to the reoccurring use of violence to regulate distance within the partnership, when desired levels of closeness are not achieved. Specifically, Bartle and Rosen (1994) described: *“When trapped within the cycle of violence, partners intermittently experience both intense closeness and distance, regulating the boundaries in the relationship so that neither partner is threatened by too much closeness or too much distance”* (p. 229). Offenders' hope for sympathy and resistance to blame is also noted in previous literature suggesting that offenders' appeal for sympathy and use of minimizations may serve as a pivotal, interpersonal pathway to victim recantation (Bonomi et al., 2011; Lee et al., in preparation).



While our findings are supported in existing literature, some limitations should be acknowledged. In setting forth a general definition of hope as “*a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen*” or a “*want (for) something to happen or be the case*” (Hope, 2010), it is possible that alternative constructions of hope were expressed, but could not be probed further in pre-recorded telephone conversations in the same way that they could be probed in a live interview. Furthermore, victims’ and offenders’ own personal conceptualization of hope, as accessed through interviewing procedures, may differ from the lexical definition put forth. To remain open to such nuances, multiple reviewers were included in the iterative data collection and analysis process, and assumptions about “hope” were intentionally probed.

The fact that offenders and victims knew they were being recorded could have constrained their conversations. However, our extensive documentation of multiple conversations showed that couples engaged in in-depth, emotionally-charged conversations despite knowledge of standard recording practices. Additionally, it is important to note that these findings pertain only to the expressed hopes between victims and offenders who engaged in conversations following partner detainment for felony level violence. We cannot speak to the communication of hope following less severe violent events, those that do not result in offender detainment, or for couples who do not re-engage in conversation.

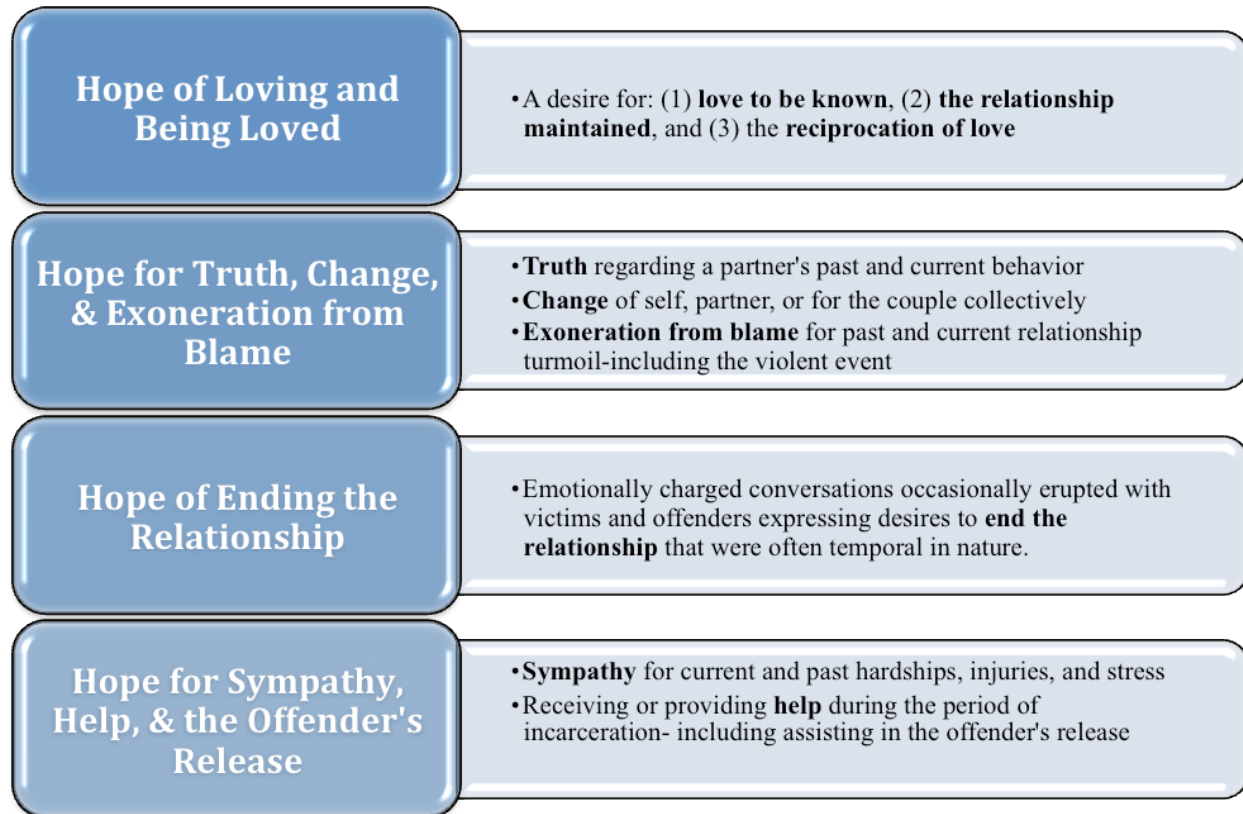
The expressed hopes that emerged from conversations between victims and offenders not only support existing literature, but also provide critical insight into the experience of victims, immediately following partner detainment for felony level violence. Most noteworthy is victims’ expressed struggle to reconcile the complex hope of maintaining the relationship with the urgent desire and need for partner change. Victims’ hope for reconciliation, voiced fear of being undesirable, and feelings of guilt surrounding the offender’s incarceration are suggestive

of a heightened state of internal conflict, anxiety, and vulnerability following partner incarceration. Victims' voiced agency, however, is also significant and consistently evidenced in the strong hope of not being blamed for the violent event and direct request for partner change. These findings vividly demonstrate the complexity of victims' emotional experience following partner detainment for felony level domestic violence.

Future consideration for how victim advocacy efforts can enhance victim support measures by taking into account the expressed hopes between victims and offenders, following the complex emotional experience of partner detainment, is warranted. Additional analysis is underway by the first author (CC) to explore the interpersonal dynamics through which the reciprocal exchange of hopes may serve to maintain violent partnerships, particularly through the activation of attachment-related anxiety and the co-construction of specific hopes. Additional attention is needed, for example, to how the expressed hopes and fears of one partner may impact subsequent expressions of hope within the violent relationship.

In summary, our findings advance an understanding of the dynamics of violent couples and the complex emotional experience following a severe violent event. As a collective process, even when heated discussions about ending the relationship and disagreements about change or blame occurred, couples commonly returned to expressions of love and hope for the offender's release.

Figure 1: Expressed Hopes Between Victims and Offenders Following a Violent Event



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