

**Why Do They Kill?
Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners:
A Brief Summary**

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This book is the culmination of over 12 years of work researching domestic homicides. I am especially proud to be sharing this book with my ‘kindred spirits’ in the fatality review field. Who better than you understand what it is like to hear the terrible details that make up such tragic stories? Much like conducting fatality reviews, my book provides a postmortem of 31 homicides and 20 near homicides. By conducting such extensive interviews with the killers, I sought to identify more than the immediate triggers to homicide. By moving backwards through time through their lives, I sought to learn about the long term factors that led to the crimes. I was particularly interested in the perpetrator’s patterns of behavior in intimate relationships, not only with the woman they killed but also with past partners as well. Having worked at Emerge, an abuser education program, for 30 years, I am experienced in doing what we call “relationship histories” with abusive men. When conducting these, we ask abusive men fourteen questions about *each* of their relationships with an intimate partner, including their most immediate victim. These questions include:

- What was your age, and her age, when you first started dating?
- How did you meet?
- What did you find attractive about her?
- What did she find attractive about you?
- When did you first have sex?
- Did you pressure her in any way?
- How long were you involved?
- What were her biggest complaints about you?
- What did you argue about?
- Were you abusive or controlling behavior toward her, and if so, how?
- What were the effects of this behavior on her?
- How did you respond to those effects?
- How did the relationship end?
- What was your response to this?

We find that revealing patterns of coercion emerge from abusive men’s responses to these questions. In effect, their answers make up a fascinating first hand account of how these men perfect their coercive and abusive styles over time.

Seeking to discern similarities as well as differences in these patterns, I asked the same questions during my five-hour interviews with each killer. However, this investigation would not have been complete without the critical perspective of victims of attempted homicide (standing in for murder victims) who survived shootings, stabbings and

strangulation. These women provide rich testimony about their partners' escalating patterns of child abuse, sexual violence, terroristic threats, and stalking. The book includes compelling accounts of how these women coped with abuse and sought help for themselves and their children.

From my interviews with victims and perpetrators, it became evident that intimate partner homicides are neither random acts nor 'crimes of passion' as commonly portrayed in the media. Rather, they are culminations of longstanding grievances on the part of abusive men. It appears that these kinds of killings are the end result of an interaction between the perpetrator and the victim. From the victim's perspective, there were fairly clear turning points in the relationship. These began with the first appearance of violence and the abuser's initial apologies and promises that it would not happen again. This was followed by the reappearance of violence. By this stage, many perpetrators had stopped apologizing and instead began blaming their victims. In response, many victims expressed dissatisfaction and talked of ending the relationship. This seemed to trigger increased monitoring, and particularly for the jealous types of perpetrators, stalking of the victim. And while most victims had already been subjected to rape and sexual humiliation prior to separation, some said that this became more severe afterwards.

Besides exploring the killer's adult lives, I also wondered whether there were common elements in the childhoods that foretold that they would kill their partners. I saw no strong predictors in the men's upbringings that they would grow up to murder their partners. There were, however, strong omens of their future violence. In most cases, their upbringings seemed indistinguishable from those of other abusive men I've counseled. As with most abusive men, the seeds for their abusive behavior were planted by abusive fathers, and in some cases, abusive mothers. The intergenerational roots to domestic violence have been well established by prior research. It appears that early exposure to domestic violence by one's father provides a powerful role modeling for boys, though clearly many men do not follow this example as adults. Men's behavior in intimate relationships is mediated by a variety of other influences in their lives, and is further influenced by their own personalities. Depending on these other factors, early exposure to domestic violence can become a negative or a positive example over time. I have known of many men who grew up with abusive fathers who ultimately recognized the negative example and followed a different path. In contrast, some of the killers I interviewed talked of coming to admire or love the fathers that they once feared. These men said that they conquered their fear by developing an aggressive and tough exterior.

Other researchers have suggested that boys exposed to domestic violence are more likely to be attracted to, and influenced by, violent social peers. Many of the killers in this study, particularly those classified as substance abusers and career criminals, said that most of their peers were also violent toward their partners. A shared disdain for women was strongly evident among many of the killers, particularly the materially motivated men and the career criminals. Even more prevalent among the killers, especially the jealous ones, was a strong distrust of women. For the most part, this distrust seemed only to increase over time and to inspire increasing levels of surveillance and violence. This distrust could well have its origins in family upbringings. Experts on children who are

exposed to family violence say that one common effect of such exposure is the development of insecurity and anxiety about intimacy. This in turn can lead to difficulty establishing relationships that rely upon intimacy and trust. Most of the jealous killers appeared to have been perpetually vigilant toward their intimate partners, and this only seemed to escalate over the course of their relationships.

I hope that my findings add to the important work of fatality reviews by providing a framework in which to give meaning to the otherwise seemingly random behavior of serious perpetrators of abuse, and by providing clues to both the immediate and the long-term triggers to their violence. Over the past twenty five years, domestic violence has emerged from behind closed doors but many women continue to severely abused in broad daylight. With better intelligence about chronic abusers, we will be better able to identify and stop those most likely to kill.