ABSTRACT
Private crises, by their very nature, pressure individuals to manage the uncontrollable on their own. Public responses devolve from multiple layers of organizational responsibility and, often antithetical, values. Information engagements weave through and across the resultant unstructured relationships. Using a critical theory lens and an intimate partner violence context, this paper posits a situational model of the dynamics information engagements within private crises and public responses.

Keywords
information interaction, power relationship, information literacy, social dynamics, government.

INTRODUCTION
Models and their underpinning analyses of individuals’ information engagements have been established within work settings (Du Preez & Fourie, 2010), educational processes (Kuhlthau, 2007; Zhang, 2008), medical needs (Hughes, Wareham, & Joshi, 2010; Olatokun & Ajagbe, 2010), everyday information needs (Dervin, 2005; Savolainen, 2009; Wilson, 1999), creative endeavors (Harlan, Bruce, & Lupton, 2012; Schiff, 2010), specific populations (Chen, Kochtanek, Burns, & Shaw, 2010; Shenton & Dixon, 2003), and other frameworks. Many of the more established models recognize both temporal components (Heverin & Zach, 2012; Neelameghan & Narayana, 2011) and dynamic spaces (Chatman, 1991; Li, Ding, Shuai, Bollen, Tang, Chen, S. & Rocha, 2012). Deeply private crises, however, present challenges not fully addressed by current models. The tension between carefully shielded, highly situated needs and publicly placed, authoritative responses creates a constellation of information interactions that require a separate explanatory structure.

PRIVATE CRISIS: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
Within the limited socio-cultural context of the United States, intimate partner violence (IPV) encompasses virtually every private crisis experienced by marginalized individuals. Unfortunately, given its complex make-up, IPV makes a particularly apt private crisis within which to develop this information engagement model. IPV consists of attacks by one member of a pair formed on the basis of romantic and/or marital relationships. The “intimate partner” connections include marriage, co-habitation, dating, and closed relationships. The “violence” includes physical, verbal, sexual, economic, and other forms of force. These forces include, for example, denial of medical care, social isolation, stalking, property destruction, and threats against family members. IPV consequences lead to several other private crises, i.e., those situations generally viewed by society at large as primarily the individuals’ personal responsibility (Goodman, Fels Smyth, Borges, & Singer, 2009; Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010; Worden & Carlson, 2005). Common IPV-related personal crises include homelessness (Baker, Billhardt, Warren, Rollins, & Glass, 2010), employment problems (Felblinger & Gates, 2008; Staggs, Long, Mason, Krishnan, & Riger, 2007; Swanberg & Logan, 2007), poverty (Bostock, Plumton, & Pratt, 2009; Chang, et al, 2010; Postmus, Plummer, McMahon, Murshid, & Kim, 2012; Sanders, Weaver, & Schnabel, 2007; Tamborra, 2012), mental illness (Krause, Kaltman, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008; Pico-Alfonso, Echeburua, & Martinez, 2008), substance abuse (Fowler, 2007; Poole, Greaves, Jategaonkar, McCulough, & Chabot, 2008; Zlotnik, Johnson, & Kohn, 2006), physical illness/conditions (McCloskey, Williams, Lichter, Gerber, Ganz, & Sege, 2007; Rountree, Pomeroy, & Marsiglia, 2008), lack of education (Horsman, 2004; Muro & Mein, 2010), potentially inadequate parenting skills (Casanueva, Foshee, & Barth, 2005; Kan, Feinberg, & Solmeyer, 2012; McDonald, Jouriles, Rosenfield, & Leahy, 2012), and criminal history (Klein, Orloff, & Sarangapani, 2005).

While IPV occurs in every socio-economic group, women with financial and social resources generally move out of violent relationships more rapidly and successfully than do their more impoverished sisters. Their resources, although
requiring a certain level of public response, help propel them towards safety. For example, their ability to afford counselors builds the psychological strength to break a relationship, their divorce lawyers support their child custody claims, and their medical insurance provides treatment for broken bones. This group of IPV survivors certainly experiences private crises but their resources allow them to choose the degree to which and the type of public response that they allow into their lives. These financially and socially secure IPV survivors fit into this nascent model, they just do so with the control that their strengthened situations provide. The model proposed herein structures those more common IPV experiences of IPV survivors whose socio-economic marginalization heightens the privacy of their crises while, simultaneously, requiring them to call more fully on public responses in order to move towards safer living.

Essential to understanding the complexity of this particular crisis, the narrative framework of the three-stage IPV abuse cycle appears repeatedly in studies from cognitive psychology (e.g., Gilchrist, 2009), sociology (e.g., Hare, 2006), women’s studies (e.g., Akers & Kaukinen, 2008), public policy (e.g., McDonough, 2010), medicine (e.g., McFarlane, 2004), and even information studies (e.g., Dunne, 2002). In the honeymoon phase the abuser ignores, repeatedly apologizes for, and/or vows to remove the “causes” for abuse (e.g., unemployment or substance abuse). In the escalation or tension phase the abuser engages in the abuse “cause,” lesser forms of abuse, and other precursors that are blamed on the survivor’s inability to behave properly. Finally, in the abuse phase the abuser engages in abuse generally at or above the level of the previous abuse phase. Each phase includes its own privacy considerations and its own public response options.

First Model Component: The Gestalt of IPV Survivors’ Context, Situation, and Critical Incident

Those private crises that engender public responses, by their very nature, arise in contexts of strong power dynamics. Viewed as “the other” and marginalized, individuals-in-crisis fall outside the socio-economic norms of self-sufficiency thereby “requiring” some level of public intervention in their most private moments. The baseline power dynamic in this relationship is operationalized in recognition of context, situation, and critical incident. These three form a gestalt from the lived experience of individuals but are distinctly separate for public responders.

Context consists of the access points to and processes among resources (both governmental and social) within socio-cultural boundaries. Every IPV survivor in the community shares that community’s context from its social patterns of providing faith-based food banks to its mandated police responses to domestic abuse calls. Of course, any survivor may live in overlapping contexts. For example, survivors in a small, extremely rural town share a resource-poor context in which education, shelters, and affordable health care are, to all intents and purposes, non-existent. That context holds true for each individual although individuals’ abilities to make use of that context vary. A subset of those individuals, however, may have sufficient access to the Internet to permit participation in online support groups. The practical resources identified and provided by those online groups establish a secondary context. The ability to identify and make substantive use of contextual resources requires domain knowledge and basic information literacy.

Situations consist of the personal background, actors, and life events pertaining to each individual. While individuals are certainly unique, patterns among situations form the basis of public response. For example, two IPV survivors may share elements of a situation in that both are teenage mothers with no high school education, no health insurance, and a financially controlling abuser. Public responses may be provided for each element of that situation such as teen parenting classes, GED tutoring, free health care clinics, and abuse counselors. Situations, however, have intangible, deeply personal elements that separate the two survivors. One may have a strong relationship with a supportive mother, no history of IPV, and an ability to organize complicated information resources. The other may have experience in using public resources, a long history of unsuccessful efforts to leave her abuser, and undiagnosed dyslexia. Evaluating situational information on an intensely personal basis calls on the ability to prioritize goals based, in part, on the nature and sufficiency of available resources.

Critical incidents consist of those events, observable or hidden, which push private crises toward new instantiations (Chang, Dado, Hawker, Cluss, Buranosky, Slagel, McNeil, et al, 2010). Observable incidents and their residue, like situation patterns, may form the basis of public response. Police and landlords witnessing a physical assault may push that private crisis toward, respectively, abuser arrest and survivor eviction. Incidents may be entirely internal as when a self-definition moves from “wife of occasionally threatening husband” to “crime victim.” That internal critical incident may lead to an enervating lack of self-efficacy or an empowering determination to change her situation. Information triggers certain incidents and public agencies’ use it to spark those incidents which, in their view, move survivors towards safer living. Whether it’s a set of informative pamphlets in an emergency room (Edwardsen & Morse, 2006) or the documents police are generally mandated to provide survivors (Finn, Westbrook, Chen, & Mensah, 2011), information objects are literally placed in the path of survivors. For IPV survivors the gestalt of context, situation, and critical incident often begins to separate into distinct elements as their sense of agency develops. For public responders, each of the three breaks down into areas of intervention responsibility and/or opportunity.
Second Model Component: Public Response from Government Organizations

At a governmental level, IPV is categorized, primarily, as a crime (Davenport, Richey, & Westbrook, 2008). Laws are promulgated on that basis with a focus on the abuser’s actions and their potential consequences. The overarching legal requirement that all crime victims have established rights, often codified in a “Victims Rights” document, covers IPV. Legislation and court rulings mandate many government responses. Child Protective Services removes children from homes in which the abuser has used a weapon (Coohey, 2007). Police follow the “mandatory arrest” law that is designed to prevent abusers from persuading crime victims or police that the abuse does not warrant arrest (White, Goldkamp, & Campbell, 2005) and courts follow “no drop” laws designed to keep abusers from intimidating their victims into retracting charges. Courts enforce local regulations requiring varying types and numbers of documents required of survivors seeking legal protections (protective order or “PO”) from further abuse (Webster, Frattaroli, Vernick, O’Sullivan, Roehl, & Campbell, 2010). Of course, individuals act on these laws with varying degrees of compliance and determinations of their meaning (Logan, Shannon, & Walker, 2006) but the laws/regulations are, at any one moment in time, immutable. In this context, survivors making their personal crisis public (or who have it made public without their consent) trigger a lock-step response which places control and authority in a process centered on abuser behavior. In comparing the power inequities in the survivor/abuser relationship and those in the survivor/criminal justice process survivors frequently take the “stick with the devil you know” approach. Genuinely useful, trusted, personalized information from a criminal justice process perspective often ameliorates the loss of control (Harding & Helweg-Larsen, 2008; Kulkarni, 2012; Rodriguez, Bauer, Flores-Ortiz, & Szkupinski-Quiroga, 1998).

In addition to the criminal justice system, the civil laws pertain to common survivor needs. Divorce and child custody predominant this portion of the legal system but self-sufficiency issues regarding housing and debt result from economic abuse. Placing their crisis in both the criminal and civil law arenas generates confusion for survivors with limited legal knowledge. For example, in many jurisdictions a criminal PO places limits on abuser-survivor interactions but, unless properly worded, does nothing to prevent abuser-child interactions, including taking sole custody of the child. Police can not seek the child or affect a new arrest. A civil PO permits them to do
so only if the civil courts have granted custody to the survivor. These apparently contradictory laws, as counter intuitive as they are, constitute a critical public response to a private crisis (Kethineni & Beichner, 2009). Since criminal and civil legal systems deliberately function without reference to each other, information from supra-resources, such as legal aid clinics, becomes critical.

From an entirely different perspective, governmental social services support for individuals’ private needs offer food, unemployment payments, and various services for some children on a society-wide basis. Specialized programs, such as Medicaid and SNAP, become part of regional and even local contexts when their implementation varies along political and ideological grounds. Politics undermines certain services as when government offices are deliberately placed at some distance from those communities in which they are most often needed (Hetling & Zhan, 2010). As in criminal justice and civil law contexts, survivors making their personal crisis public trigger a bounded set of responses over which many of the actors have limited control and even less interest in providing information need to develop a coherent plan of action (East & Bussey, 2007).

In all three of these forms of public response (criminal justice, civil law, and social services) most survivors recognize some pieces of context and situation in relationship to their critical incident. In acting on those relationships among very public responses, they are virtually required to slice their self-identities into subsets designed to meet publicly defined, broad categories (Garrett-Peters, 2009). Although she will always be an IPV survivor, a woman may also be required to self-identify as a “crime victim” throughout the process of filing criminal charges against her abuser and as “unemployed” throughout the process of working towards economic self-sufficiency. Asking for what they need without reference to their abuse (Macy, Nurius, Kernic, & Holt, 2005) negates the shame or fear of speaking publicly about their private crisis. Alternatively, in maintaining affective control by reaffirming their self-identity (Robinson, 2007) survivors may actively encourage these general agency staff to view them through the lens of abuse. The familiarity of that role can create a socially safe space from which to work.

Finally, the public library fits into the governmental response category with its uniquely flexible, customized response to individuals’ private needs. Serving populations well beyond those of the criminal justice, civil law, and social service systems, public libraries have the potential to provide significant resources with an ethos that actually requires protecting individuals’ privacy (Curley, 2010; Yi Ling, 2009). Library services are the only governmental resource that looks at survivors holistically, provides a problem-solving basis for each interaction, and assumes the survivor has a functional sense of agency. In addition to their effectively structured array of resources, libraries offer information literacy, information management, and Internet safety instruction/support. They serve as a gateway to community resources and, in many instances, add their own weight to shifting community dynamics (Hodgetts, Stolte, Chamerblain, Radley, Nikora, Nabalarua, & Groot, 2008) by providing a forum within which resources are actually delivered, as when hosting workshops on resume writing and financial literacy. Although relatively few libraries actively create service and resources for the socio-economically marginalized, the potential exists and the responsibility is incontrovertible (Gehner, 2010; Jaeger & Bertot, 2011; Sturges & Gastinger, 2010; Westbrook & Gonzalez, 2011; Williams, 2012).

Third Model Component: Public Response from Non-Governmental Organizations

At a non-governmental (NGO) level, IPV is viewed from a sociological perspective as a constellation of or a specific personal need(s). Services and resources have been, since the early 1960s (Hendrix, 2004), developed to meet immediate IPV needs (e.g., personal safety, subsistence living) and, more recently, (Kulkarni, Bell, & Rhodes, 2012) life-changing IPV needs (e.g., mental health, financial self-sufficiency). No overarching guideline requires NGO cooperation but the development of self-determination based services gives survivors more control of their engagement with public response organizations (Vaughn & Stamp, 2003).
NGO services fall into five groups: emergency abuse services, life essentials, health, self-sufficiency, and long-term independence. Obviously they overlap as when reasonably good physical health underpins self-sufficiency’s employment goal. The five groups reflect service foci, just as governmental foci fall into criminal justice, civil law, life essentials, and library services. Their funding sources, service mandates, staff knowledge domains, and goals cluster around these areas of responsibility. Fully established IPV shelters (of which there are relatively few) serve as a community service gateway to individual services needed to address a critical incident and particular sets of services needed to address a situation. They share this gateway function with public libraries and the 211-service. Full shelters require public disclosure of private crises in order to provide customized, problem solving processes. Public libraries discourage disclosure of private crises and provide customized, but very limited problem solving as well as referrals. The 211-service does not address disclosure of private crises and provides simple referrals. Maximizing these three information pathways requires a nuanced understanding of context, situation, and critical incident.

Fourth Model Component: Contrast of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations’ Public Responses

Public response organizations generally recognize each other’s existence in broad terms within their spheres of responsibility, e.g., police recognize District Attorneys and food bank managers recognize shelter directors. Increasingly, organizations recognize each other’s role across spheres of responsibility, e.g., police develop victim services programs that call on shelter staff expertise. Instantiation of any recognition plays out along continuums of mutual awareness and authoritative goals.
Deliberate mutual awareness provides an opportunity for survivors’ agency development in that it adds information on the options open to them. For example, court advocates working for a shelter stay with survivors throughout the entire public process of filing criminal charges; prosecutors incorporate court advocates in their prosecution preparation. The former focus on affective support for survivors and the latter focus on practical consequences for the abuser but their mutual awareness develops at such a coherent level that survivors obtain an opportunity for developing the agency needed to make their own decisions about filing charges.

Authoritative goals, mandated by law or regulation, often push against each other even when ostensibly aligned. The “life essentials” category best exemplifies this paradox in that it appears in both government and NGO public responses.

- For survivors, life-essential goals generally consist of obtaining shelter and food for themselves and their children. These goals must be met on both an immediate and, at least potentially, stable basis before any significant movement towards safer living is seen as a viable option.

- Governmental life-essentials goals generally consist of implementing processes for optional services, such as Food Stamps. Services do not coordinate in terms of requirements, funding sources, or survivor’s defined role but they do, as a whole, provide the possibility of somewhat meaningful support. However, the government’s law enforcement goals trump life-essentials goals in that the former’s authority demands law enforcement action for meaningful implementation while the latter’s authority requires survivor action for hard results. Survivors have no control over the contradiction between their priorities for life-essentials and the government’s priorities for law enforcement.

- NGO life-essentials goals generally consist of meeting immediate, concrete needs for shelter and food. The temporal limitations, however, rarely match the survivor’s need for transitional support and even more rarely coordinate with governmental service.

Mutual awareness among public responders can, of course, highlight and even address disconnects between authoritative goals (Nuszkowski, Coben, Kelleher, Goldcamp, Hazen, & Connelly, 2007; Payne & Triplett, 2009). Governmental civil law processes lead to hard goals
that have an objective, concrete outcome, e.g., child custody is awarded to the survivor. NGO self sufficiency problem solving efforts lead to soft that goals that have an internalized, open-ended outcome, e.g., effective parenting is integrated into daily life. The NGO problem-solving work towards soft end goals can include notice of government task-based work towards hard end goals. Knowing about these disparate goals and filtering that knowledge through their own situations provides the baseline for survivors who must determine their own pathways to safer living. That baseline, however, requires information literacy skills as much as it does self-reflection.

**Fifth Model Component: Information Interactions**

Survivors must deliberately work to gain control and develop agency in the maelstrom of necessarily mismatched, even contradictory, public responses to their private crises. Almost infinite variations in organizations’ tone, responsibilities, resources, experiences, and service options shape information interactions between survivors and organizations as well as across clusters of organizations (Bostock, Plumpton, & Pratt, 2009; Eckhardt, Murphy, Black, & Shur, 2006; Skiff, Horwitz, Larussa-Trot, Pearson, & Santiago, 2008). Skills that maximize effective information interactions include computer literacy, information management, and information exchange analysis.

A moderate level of computer literacy is required to access government resources (Wathen & McKeown, 2010), apply for jobs, and maintain many social support networks (Baughman, 2010; Dare & Green, 2011; Lijun, 2010; Trotter & Allen, 2009). With the established social expectation of computer access and use, governmental organizations increasingly assume functional information literacy (Kim, Lee, & Menon, 2009) just as they do functional reading literacy. The safety considerations of several IPV situations and several common digitally based critical incidents demand that survivors practice a self-reflective review of online interactions. When, for example, does an online job application generate a potentially dangerous digital trail? Online stalking and other forms of digitally based abuse require particularly sophisticated levels of computer literacy (Dimond, Fiesler, & Bruckman, 2011; King-Ries, 2011).

Information management challenges most people engaged in a bureaucratic process. Problems of any complexity are rarely solved or even clarified in a single phone call, email exchange, or office visit. Add in the argot of separate organizations, decision-tree based choices, unsynchronized deadlines, and potentially public documents and survivors’ information management challenges appear unrealistically complicated. Segregating private information (e.g., social security and credit card numbers), organizing forms required by varying NGO organizations, maintaining a calendar of legal/process due dates, establishing a record of task milestones, and similar information management skills are key to navigating information exchanges from a survivor’s perspective. This type of management provides some personal control of life choices but information overload (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Savolainen, 2007) can seriously undermine a survivor’s growing sense of agency.

Analyzing their required information exchanges supports survivors’ personal choices regarding their own self-revelation. By watching for that line between required and recommended information exchanges, they can more effectively choose how much, if any, of their private crisis they care to reveal. For example, public housing authorities often require criminal background checks. These can be problematic for survivors who live in a dual arrest jurisdiction where both parties are arrested when officers have not been trained to separate defensive from offensive wounds. Identification as a crime victim can be effective, particularly when supportive documentation is provided, in addressing problems caused by the background check. Learning to analyze such information exchange options, opportunities, and requirements in general-service agency interactions enhances survivor control over personal decision-making.

**PRIVATE CRISES/PUBLIC RESPONSES: A MODEL OF ACTORS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT**

Survivors’ contexts may include any of the governmental and NGO services so genuine access requires sufficient domain knowledge to identify appropriate services. Survivors’ situations almost always require an array of public responses but, like uncoordinated prescriptions, service combinations can cause unanticipated harm for those lacking knowledge of service processes. Survivor’s critical incidents, when externalized enough to engage with public responses, often require a well developed problem-solving ability to place highly focused needs within a generalized service mandate. Context, situation, and critical incident require domain knowledge, process knowledge, and problem solving skills to function throughout the personal crisis experience.

The temporal arcs of survivors’ private crises and organizations’ public responses move in, essentially, different time zones. Survivors’ arcs are open-ended both internally (e.g., watching for the next phase of the abuse cycle when honeymoon months devolve into abuse days) and externally (e.g., building self-sufficiency by using job training to get a position with medical insurance). Government arcs are rigid and codified with varying levels of sensitivity to the survivor as an individual. Most of these arcs include steps that fulfill a process in order to reach a hard goal. For example, the steps of filing charges helps fulfill the process of abuser prosecution to reach the hard goal of imprisoning the abuser. NGO service temporal arcs are bound by funding sources (e.g., a two-year foundation grant for transitional housing) and service guidelines (e.g.,
shelter housing is only available for 90 days). Most of these arcs use processes (e.g., coaching on life skills) to work towards a soft goal (e.g., building financial literacy to support safer living).

Proof of any kind of income coming in, whether it’s disability, child support, income from your job. (Survivor, interview) (Westbrook, 2008, p. 254)

The laissez-faire information professional’s role in personal crises is, like the unexamined life, not worth living. By virtue of our expertise we stand somewhat outside the crisis and response perspectives. We can serve as physicians, doing no harm and seeking the clean, absolute cure of individual information problems. That medical model fails on several points but particularly in that it usurps a survivor’s control within the crisis context. Alternatively, we can serve as an information advocate, advisor, and creator by becoming a student of and participant in the public community structure. This organic model calls for creating effective information spaces within public response organizations to better support survivors’ work in shaping their own movements. Facing the inherent power dynamics between and among all actors in these contexts, we can become the guerilla activists shaping public response to private crisis via deliberate management of the crisis information ecology. This assertive model posits information as part of the dominant context by the very act of deconstructing a particular ecology. Information professionals are bound by ethical precepts to practice self-

IMPLICATIONS

When you want to apply for emergency assistance, it’s best to have every [piece of] information on hand that they’re gonna basically ask for. Any interview you go to with any kind of government assistance. For instance, proof of residency. They give you a letter of residency here [at the shelter].
reflection particularly in establishing the social responsibilities inherent in their professional roles. Perhaps that introspection is most needed when considering those deeply private crises that individuals face on their own.

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1 These pairs form in any combination of genders but 85% of them are male on female (McClennen, 2005; Rennison, 2001) and that is the sub-population to which this nascent model is applied. The other gender combinations may require separate studies of their attendant social and legal power dynamics but the model is expected to be of value in that research.

2 The major exception to this norm is that of immigrants, documented and undocumented, who have little cultural expectation of support and/or an acceptance of abuse as an accepted part of any intimate partner relationship (Kulwicki, Aswad, Carmona, & Ballout, 2010; Vidales, 2010).

3 The 211-service provides referrals to local social services from government managed programs, such as Medicaid, to NGO programs, such as a church food bank. Its purview is factual referrals rather than process-based problem solving.