2018

Women of Intimate Partner Abuse: Traumatic Bonding Phenomenon

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

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by

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MA, Argosy University, 2012

BA, The George Washington University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

Researchers indicate women succumb to relational abuse as seen with maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and implicit maltreatment. Implicit violence and nonviolence, bonding victims to victimizers remains unstudied, although the domestic abuse phenomenon continues. Intimate partner abuse was examined through qualitative inquiry. There is much to learn about female victim perspectives describing attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit maltreatment experiences. Traumatic bonding theory served as the lens through which female participant responses were examined in this study. Research questions were developed to focus on female attachment bond perceptions, views concerning self-esteem, self-identity, or self-reference, and implicit aggression, coercive control, or manipulation experiences. The foundation for the qualitative research design was phenomenological constructivism. The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory served as the standardized assessment instrument for data collection. Participant responses from the questionnaire and semistructured interview questions were organized through analytic coding, resulting in meaningful, composite categories for thematic conclusions. Data from 10 female participants who previously experienced intimate abuse were collected and analyzed. Thematic coding resulted in survivor experiences categorized by caustic, deceptive, emotional, implicit, and oppressive traumatization. Themes involved psychological entanglement with the abuser due to humiliation, or physical entrapment by the abuser due to opposition. Victim perspective and experience can potentially improve how the law, law enforcement, or health care professionals, view, treat, and protect abuse victims.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Intimate partnership is a controversial topic when examined within the context of abuse (Ali, Dhingra, & McGarry, 2016; Notestine, Murray, Borders, & Ackerman, 2017). Intimate partner abuse (IPA) perpetration in the United States continues unabated (Nevala, 2017; O'Doherty, Taft, McNair, & Hegarty, 2016) in a Western civilization wherein domestic violence (DV) is negatively viewed (Eckstein, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). Violent and nonviolent IPA is pervasive in the United States (Pill, Day, & Mildred, 2017; Salcioglu, Urhan, Pirinccioglu, & Aydin, 2017). Victimization in intimate relationships is alarmingly common, necessitating IPA research (Ali et al., 2016; Godbout et al., 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). Partner abuse continues to be a significant social issue, as psychological aggression is highly prevalent within intimate relationships (Munoz, Brady, & Brown, 2017; Tougas, Peloquin, & Mondor, 2016).

Limited in IPA research are victim descriptions illustrating how intimate partnership can exist despite abuse (Grana, Montesino, & O'Leary, 2016; Nevala, 2017), detailing attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit maltreatment experiences (Godbout et al., 2017). Complexities within IPA require greater empirical exploration, particularly regarding attachment, dependency, and power dynamics (Oka, Brown, & Miller, 2016). Absent from IPA research are studies specific to the proliferate longevity of relational attachment and implicit abuse (Tougas et al., 2016), including the long-term influence found with conflicted victim identity (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Tani, Peterson, & Smorti, 2016; Velonis et al., 2016). Implicit aspects voiced by female IPA victims

suffering maladaptive attachment or identity enmeshment need qualitative examination (Eckstein, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017). Both victim and survivor responses could provide necessary information for treatment, law enforcement, and community resource needs (Birdsall, Kirby, & McManus, 2017; Meyer, 2016; Shah, Vetere, & Brown, 2016).

The remainder of Chapter 1 serves to introduce IPA by delineating maladaptive attachment styles (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016), enmeshed identity conflicts (Adjei, 2017a; O'Doherty, 2016), and implicitly controlled victim experiences (Oka et al., 2016). Implicit maltreatment influencing relational continuity, despite the abuse target's danger risk (Curtis, Epstein, & Wheeler, 2017), is framed within traumatic bonding theory. Qualitative victim study, including adaptive coping strategies (Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill, Bell, & Wyngarden, 2016), resiliency (Crann & Barata, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018), identity (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Murray, Crowe, & Overstreet, 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016), agency to leave (McCleary-Sills et al. 2016; Meyer, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017), and recovery (Kern, 2017; Toews & Bermea, 2017), provides information for empirically understanding female submission to IPA. Phenomenological inquiry into survivor perspectives and experiences can further qualify IPA persistence.

Background

Nearly 15 % of adult relationships in the United States involve physical aggression (Curtis et al., 2017). Approximately 35% of adolescent or young adult relationships include violence perpetration and victimization (Godbout et al., 2017). Females experiencing physical relational violence rose beyond 29 million by 2011 (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017), accounting for more than 22% of women in the United States

(Sherrill et al., 2016). More recently, more than 29% of women in the United States have identified experiencing IPA in at least one form (Nevala, 2017). Up to 42 million American women endure long-term IPA victimization, and upwards of 58 million American women articulate experiencing psychological relational abuse (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Approximately one in three women throughout the world endure IPA in at least one form of physical or sexual compromise (Adjei, 2017a; Kavak, Akturk, Ozdemir, & Gultekin, 2018; Kern, 2017; Megias, Toro-Garcia, & Carretero-Dios, 2018; Munoz et al., 2017), with one in four being severely violated physically (Notestine et al., 2017).

The connection between perpetrator attachment and aggression within IPA dynamics is germane to victim enmeshment from conflicted identity and implicitly bonding maltreatment (Oka et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). An abuse perpetrator's insecure attachment directly affects the relational and physical aggression (Curtis et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). Relational aggression, unlike physical aggression, does not necessarily reflect physical violence (Candela, 2016; Wright, 2017). An abuser's relational aggression includes intricate violence displays interspersed with nonviolent or nonphysical acts, asserting dominance, intimidation, and control over the victim (Ali et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017). Psychological aggression, emotional manipulation, and psychological violence are perpetrated through verbally demeaning (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016), socially isolating (Umubyeyi, Persson, Mogren, & Krantz, 2016), or coercively controlling behaviors (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Gadd & Corr, 2017).

Implicit IPA negatively affects victim self-esteem and sense of self, indelibly influencing identity (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Gagnon, Lee, & DePrince, 2017). Intimate

partner abusers impose conditions morphing, skewing, or tainting the targets conceptual formation of personal and relational identification (Shah et al., 2016). Relationship schemas form, wherein mistreatment is expected by the maltreated (Gagnon et al., 2017). Recurrent trauma experiences solidify negative expectations, promoting abuse acceptance necessary for survival while compromising victim self-identity (Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). The abused become normalized to chaos, instability, danger, and vulnerability (Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Velonis et al., 2016). Victim self-identity forms around the intimate abuse dynamics, while a gradual emotional unraveling reinforces hypervigilance, disorientation, and erosion of personal identification (Eckstein, 2016).

How attachment bond, identity enmeshment, and implicit maltreatment contribute to or mediate for relational continuity remains empirically convoluted (Curtis et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). The interaction between attachment subtype and relational aggression is a prominent consideration when exploring IPA dynamics (Godbout et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016). Individual as well as dyadic investigation, the interplay between each attachment style of a couple on the other person's behavior, is necessary for accurately reflecting both subtle and explicit IPA victim experiences (Godbout et al., 2017; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Survivor capacity for recognizing coping mechanisms for self-image protection from the relationship reality (Eckstein, 2016; O'Doherty, 2016), is also important. Identified coping tactics for women surviving IPA include minimizing, denying, or ignoring psychologically or physically controlling behaviors (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Kern, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

Comprehensive IPA study has been limited by deficient qualitative examination of an attachment bond formed for the abused to her abuser (Ali et al., 2016; Park, 2016). Current researchers have indicated within the omnibus of IPA findings, specific need for investigating victim perspectives and experiences (Adjei, 2017a; Crann & Barata, 2016; Kern, 2017). Traumatic bonding experiences for women in abusive relationships require documentation, as victim perspectives are absent or inadequately voiced (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Munoz et al., 2017). Female attachment perceptions (Tougas et al., 2016), self-perceptions (O'Doherty et al., 2016), and implicit maltreatment experiences (Salcioglu et al., 2017) require further qualitative exploration. Implicit abuse experiences, such as oppression or control, are multidimensional, the relationship between these aspects and target attachment to her abuser is still misunderstood (Meyer, 2016; Nevala, 2017; Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016).

Coercive control is a conceptual foundation of implicit violence perpetration experienced by victims needing more concerted examination (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Nevala, 2017). Less empirical attention devoted to direct psychological, implicit implications for IPA victims and survivors could indicate two relevant concerns (Tougas et al., 2016). There is a normalized acceptance for nonphysical violence being less dangerous or severe than physical injury (Candela, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Normative cultural narratives also only differentiate overt physical violence as credible, verifiable, or legitimate harm (Myhill & Johnson, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Abuse stereotypes have led to bias within society, legislation, law enforcement, and with victims themselves (Birdsall et al., 2017; Candela, 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). Focus on

physical abuse within IPA severely limits viable research regarding more prevalently experienced by implicit abuse recipients (Candela, 2016; Neal & Edwards, 2017).

Interviews of IPA survivors who experienced maladaptive attachment could better inform why women stay in abusive relationships (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). Qualitative interviews may be used to more clearly represent meaning for attachment to the abuser, as ascribed by abused women (Oka et al., 2016; Park, 2016). Perceptions concerning implicit relational aggression experiences may also be meaningfully interpreted (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Oka et al., 2016). Researchers examining insecure attachment subtype may better explain the specific psychological aggression instances experienced by IPA female victims (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). Power dynamic perceptions amongst, and within couples are also indicated as unanswered IPA explanations (Eckstein, 2016; Oka et al., 2016).

Analytic, interpretive coding may enhance clinician awareness about maladaptive attachment and identity enmeshment due to implicit maltreatment experiences. A spectrum of reasons motivates women entrapped in or having left an abusive relationship, to seek out services (Adjei, 2017b; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). There are discrete ways victims informally disclose harm or request help (Messing, O'Sullivan, Cavanaugh, Webster, & Campbell, 2017). Mistreated women may access help without revealing IPA history (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Further research is needed on victim identity conflicts (Adjei, 2017a; Kern, 2017), when or why help is pursued (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Meyer, 2016), and the degree of victim disclosure (Buchbinder & Barakat, 2016; Parvin, Sultana, & Naved, 2016).

Problem Statement

Women remain vested in implicitly controlled and dangerously maintained relationships by abusive partners (Curtis et al., 2017; Notestine et al., 2017; Sherrill et al., 2016). Researchers of IPA prevalence consistently indicate female victimization by male perpetrators is endemically global (Megias et al., 2018; Mills, Hill, & Johnson, 2018; Pill et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Existence and perpetuation of IPA implies maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and implicit maltreatment relationally bonds the abused to the abusive partner (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2017).

The absence of the female voice in empirical study may undermine attempts to evaluate IPA, comprehensively (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017). There is a void in IPA research investigating victim experiences and partner power perceptions (Oka et al., 2016). Perspectives from the targets of abuse may serve to reveal coercive control experiences, a key implicit IPA component (Ali et al., 2016). Such revelations may improve identification, diagnosis, intervention, or treatment for the implicitly abused or traumatized (Ali et al., 2016; Birdsall et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

A phenomenological constructivist design was used to explore female perspectives regarding attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit IPA experiences. A qualitative inquiry was intended to glean female survivor perspectives about lived experiences in abusive relationships (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Crann & Barata, 2016; Kern, 2017; Meyer, 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Sherrill et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Examination of lived experiences

may add to what is currently known regarding women remaining in abusive relationships, despite the danger risk (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2018; Velonis et al., 2017). Female survivor perspective and experience was not only the catalyst. The contextualization for illustrating traumatic bonding was also explored.

Research Questions

The qualitative research questions (RQ) are as follows:

RQ1- How does a female victim perceive her attachment bond to her abusive partner?

RQ2- How does a female victim view herself in relation to her abusive relationship?

RQ3- How does a female victim experience her partner's implicit relational abuse?

Conceptual Framework

The traumatic bonding phenomenon centers on violence intermittency affording victims space and time for emotionally enmeshing with the abuser (Dutton & Painter, 1993a). There is significant positive correlation for targets experiencing frequent emotional injury and intermittent physical harm (Dutton & Painter, 1993b). Traumatic bonding is distinctively specific to attachment reasons for women staying with abusers (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016; Torres et al., 2016). Attachment intensity from victim to abuser is prompted by the dysfunction of maltreatment (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016; Tani et al., 2016).

A prominent aspect defining the relationship is implicit maltreatment (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Implicit maltreatment is not exclusively typified by physical injury accompanying life threatening circumstances (Nevala, 2017). Periodic chaos precedes or follows periodic quiet and calm (Birdsall et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016). The more common implicit harm experienced by victims are coercively controlling conditions exhibited by subtle, varied manipulation by abusers (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). Relational coercion consistently comprises emotional confusion or confliction for the abused (Candela, 2016; Hayes & Jefferies, 2016; Little, 2017). A more in-depth analysis into the components of traumatic bonding as a contextual lens is presented in Chapter 2.

An abuser's insecure relational attachment amplifies intensity, severity, and longevity of the elements comprising relational maltreatment (Godbout et al., 2017; Tani et al., 2016). Violence, assault, or harm consequences result in greater danger potential and injury vulnerability for female victims (Birdsall et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). The aggressor's cycle of cruelty and conflict conditions the target's maltreatment tolerance (Gagnon et al., 2017). Traumatic, recurrent betrayal by the tormentor habituates the abused to awareness inhibition, dissociation, and adaptation to injury (Gagnon et al., 2017). Emotional separation for escape may be necessary for IPA victims when physical separation is not possible (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Maladaptive attachment, emotional enmeshment, and conflicted identification within an abusive relationship, occur when psychological trauma associations converge (Gagnon et al., 2017). The prominent trauma associations are power incongruences (Adjei, 2017b; Birdsall et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016), victim intermittent abuse

experiences (Park, 2016), and paradoxical attachment (Buchbinder & Barakat, 2016; Godbout et al., 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Paradoxical attachment is reflected by three identifying factors. Subjective partner attachment perspectives, self-esteem perceptions, and actual trauma experiences represent relationship dynamics. These dynamics are complicit with creating, cultivating, and coalescing traumatic bonds from victim to victimizer (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Shah et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016). Traumatic bonding and these key elements are more thoroughly explained in Chapter 2.

Female survivor perspectives and experiences specific to bonding attachment, identity enmeshment, and implicit abuse, are framed within traumatic bonding theory. Research pertinent to female victimization and conditioned violence expectation aided in research question development. Relational disputes generate differing emotional experiences, the maltreated respond to and cope with conflict differently from abusive counterparts (Gagnon et al., 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Further investigation is needed for victim behavioral responsiveness to, and coping strategies for relational conflict (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Sherrill et al., 2016). Traumatic experiences may threaten a target's perceived reality, triggering addictive compulsions evident in attachment, enmeshment, and identification issues (Godbout et al., 2017).

Traumatic bonding theory is helpful to bolster conceptual understanding of abusive relational addiction power and permanence. The theory is also helpful in bridging the gap between addiction and IPA research. Phenomenological methodology from a qualitative research design can be used to further identify subjective elements of abuse survivor experiences. Female narratives serve to signify how the abused cope, and

how survivors successfully separate from the injurious cycle (Crann & Barata, 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016). Qualitative examination pertaining to female survivor narratives is more thoroughly integrated into conceptual context in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative inquiry was designed to further explore and analyze what female survivors indicate as bonded attachment, enmeshed identity, and implicit abuse experience. Intimate partner violence (IPV) and DV is referred to as IPA throughout the study. Responses from women who suffered IPA were examined, phenomenologically, using traumatic bonding theory as a lens. In-person interviews, used as the data collection method, aided in documenting perspectives of, and experiences for women previously attached to and enmeshed in abusive relationships. Study exploration included participant experiences in the abusive relationship, with the abuser, and self-perspectives concerning attachment, identity, and implicit maltreatments.

Traumatic bonding applicability was examined through interview data analysis, and the extent emergent themes reflected theory principles. Specific themes included implicit abuse punctuated with intermittent physical aggression and paradoxical attachment. This study was a naturalistic qualitative research design. Female survivors aged 18 to 65 years who experienced IPA for a minimum 1-year length were the targeted participant population. Inclusion criteria were heterosexual women without children at the time of the abuse. Data were collected from 60-minute interviews, including one short form standardized questionnaire and semi-structured questions.

The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) was selected to provide contextual detail, enhancing the semi-structured interview responses. Data obtained were coded to determine interpretive themes. The qualitative study was used for analytically focused sampling, a process to thoroughly expound qualitative information for a more in-depth interpretation into recurrent themes. Emergent coding was used to provide enhanced optimization of the collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Definitions

Abuse identity forms when a victim's fracturing sense of self is met with overwhelming stigmatized shame, necessitating maltreatment concealment to preserve a less abject public identity (O'Doherty et al., 2016; p. 234).

Battering is the concentrated but longitudinal bombardment of physical, sexual, and emotional violence (Notestine et al., 2017, p. 57).

Coercive control is a prominent implicit abuse aspect reflected by purposeful, intentional, and recurrent aggressor tactics conditioning victims to the expectation of coercion, manipulation, and autonomy suppression (Nevala, 2017, p. 1794).

Cognitive reappraisal is intentional thought adjustment to accommodate less emotional reactivity and inhibit negative urgency to engage in aggression (Blake, Hopkins, Sprunger, Eckhardt, & Denson, 2018).

Dyadic investigation is the examination of the interplay between each attachment style of a couple on the other person's behavior (Oka et al., 2016).

Empathic accuracy is the ability to correctly interpret partner perspective or emotional experience (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016, p. 142).

Gas lighting is a coercive strategy used by abusers to cognitively disrupt victims with reality confusion (Dutton, 2007, p. 75).

Graft is the connection maintaining the bond from abused to abuser. The graft of traumatic bonding necessitates attachment broaching enmeshment and addiction.

Grip is the hook or hold initially bonding the abused to the abuser. The grip of traumatic bonding necessitates connection broaching maladaptive attachment.

Intimate terrorism is violence coupled with nonviolent power and control tactics, including humiliation, degradation, verbal threats, physical intimidation, privacy intrusiveness, restricted autonomy, and victim blame (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016; p. 41).

Identity enmeshment is conflicted identification with an abuser. Self-identity becomes fused with an abuse identity (Adjei, 2017a; O'Doherty et al., 2016).

Intimate Partner Abuse is physical, psychological, or moral maltreatment manifested by violence, coercion, manipulation, isolation, and intimidation meant to dominate, control, or devalue (Mills et al., p. 186).

Implicit abuse involves nonphysical acts, wherein, aggressors purposefully, intentionally, and recurrently engage in, or perpetrate dominance, intimidation, or control over victims (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016, Nevala, 2017).

Learned helplessness is submission to an external locus of control (Freidman & Schustack, 2016, p.232), preventing agency for leaving the abusive relationship.

Maladaptive attachment is a victim's emotional bond to the tormentor despite the negative ramifications experienced due to the relationship, and because of the instinctual need to survive (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016).

Paradoxical attachment is the strengthening affective bond occurring when intermittent good to bad treatment occurs (Dutton & Painter, 1993a, p. 106).

Psychic numbing is a self-defensive response for victims, occurring after repeated trauma exposure (Gagnon et al., 2017; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016).

Psychological abuse broadly includes hostile measures to coerce, control, threaten, manipulate, monitor, intimidate, or humiliate (Mills et al., 2018, p. 187).

Psychological aggression encompasses verbal or nonverbal negative communication targeted at intimate partner self-esteem and psychological well-being by intentionally belittling, isolating, or controlling (Tougas et al., 2016; p. 198).

Relational aggression are behaviors, not exclusively physical, directed at attachment needs of belonging, acceptance, or intimacy (Oka et al., 2016, p. 24).

Resiliency is evidenced by adaptability when experiencing adversity, formed in time as complex psychological, social, environmental, or biological oppositions are either resisted or overcome by control and hope perceptions (Munoz et al., 2017, p. 102).

Traumatic bonding is the compelling emotional attachment forming despite abuse, and because of, power imbalance (Dutton & Painter, 1993a, p. 106).

Assumptions

Both men and women are victims of IPA. Women were anticipated to have the greater need for empirical study. Higher female victimization is presumed to have greater relevance despite current research demonstrating IPA perpetration is evidenced with bidirectionality and gender inclusion (Curtis et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Straus & Gozjolko, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Male survivors were excluded from recruitment.

Female participants were further assumed to be honest during the interviews. Skewed perspectives may have been proffered, as self-report can be biased. Intentional dishonesty was a possibility, although not a concern.

The participants were expected to demonstrate traumatic bonding to the abuser. Participants indicating traumatic bonds were likely, though it was possible contrary responses would result. Participants in the study may not have indicated staying in or returning to the relationship was due to an emotional bond, attachment, or enmeshment. It was possible traumatic bonding theory would not be reflected in the information disclosed by research participants. All three assumptions did not delegitimize the identified need for qualitative research focused on female IPA survivors.

Scope and Delimitations

Survivor responses were a conveyor for contextually illustrating traumatic bonding theory. Attachment and identity perspectives, along with implicit abuse experiences, comprised the scope of this qualitative exploration. Perspectives about attachment to, dependence on the intimate abuser was the focus for the first research question. The second research question pertained to participant self-perspective regarding esteem, identity, and reference. The third research question emphasis was implicit coercion, control, manipulation, isolation, intimidation, surveillance, or threats.

Childless female victims during the IPA were the targeted population. Female narratives change from victim to survivor when an empowering moment or shift is experienced (O'Doherty et al., 2016). A distinct outcome for women surviving and leaving an abusive relationship includes finding resolve because of the child's or

children's welfare. The "mother" identity competes with the dominant abuse identity, eventually spurring actions necessary for ending the relationship (O'Doherty et al., 2016, p. 234). Child presence in a relationship significantly influences relationship dynamics and would obstruct or obfuscate traumatic bonding applicability analysis. Children may influence intermittent maltreatment power dynamics solidifying traumatic bonding, entrenching a victim's emotional attachment to, or enmeshment with the abusive partner.

The small purposeful sampling, results, interpretive themes, and conclusions, may be compatible with a broader population. Heterosexual, childless women who endured abuse for less than a year may indicate similar results. Heterosexual women with children were not examined and results cannot be generalized. Transferability is the capacity for a study's data to be applied to similar, alternate settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability is limited given the study specificity. The specific research process, recruitment locations, participant selection parameters, and participant exclusion considerations shape the transferability limitations.

Limitations

Participant sampling was restricted to female IPA survivors. The purposive population limits transferability, applicability, and generalizability of the research results. Generalizability of the results are also limited to female victims without children during the abuse. Another limitation is exploring the humanity of women who submit to abusive partners, not victim pathology, as mental illness was not studied. Participants were limited to women, orienting the qualitative design toward female survivors. Male survivors are important to IPA research. Perspectives and experiences of men were

excluded from the study scope as women were assumed to be the most threatened gender concerning IPA needing continued investigation.

An additional qualitative methodology limitation resides in participant self-report bias, which could affect the accuracy and dependability of responses. Informed consent regarding the confidentiality of study participation may assist with minimizing biased responding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interviewer integrated a standardized assessment with structured self-report measures as a means to preventing any acquiescent responding (Creswell, 2017). Semistructured interviews used together with a standardized questionnaire may filter a research participant's unintentional or intentional inconsistencies, exaggeration, minimization, or malingering.

Significance

There are empirical research deficiencies pertinent to IPA victims implicit abuse experiences (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016) and powerful traumatic bonding (Birdsall et al., 2017). This qualitative study was an exploration of female attachment to, and enmeshing identification with implicitly controlled relationships. Attachment, identity, and implicit abuse experiences comprised the study's scope. Examination of participant responses can assist with a more qualitatively meaningful analysis into prevailing IPA endurance (Godbout et al., 2017; Nevala, 2017; Tani et al., 2016).

Participants disclosed perspectives regarding attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit maltreatment experiences. The responses by survivors of abuse may better inform clinicians, and other IPA victims about the phenomenon. Study results may allow relevant conclusions to be made regarding intervention, treatment, and survival

implications. Two specific benefits have been identified for qualitatively investigating victim perspective and experience. Clinicians explaining what can be expected emotionally during an abusive relationship split can be invaluable information (Notestine et al., 2017). Professional communication to women regarding what facilitates successful separation from a traumatically formed bond can also be valuable (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Notestine et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016).

Research on traumatic bonding can also potentially affect how police departments operationally identify DV (Myhill & Johnson, 2016), procedurally intercede (Birdsall et al., 2017), and how DV cases are legislatively addressed (Cala, Trigo, & Saavedra, 2016). Police officers prioritize DV calls low (Johnson & Dai, 2016), or DV perpetrators end up being charged with the lowest assault form (Birdall et al., 2017). Police accuracy in assessing risk when responding to DV calls, is controversially viewed as victim cooperation and officer impartiality are key to proper DV case intervention (Birdsall et al., 2017; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). Victim emotional attachment or dependence can thwart officer attempts to classify a domestic incidence or develop a safety plan for the victim (Birdsall et al., 2017). Conviction requirements (Johnson & Dai, 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017) and diagnostic criteria for a woman to be deemed battered (Candela, 2016), or suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Smith et al., 2016), currently involves outdated, oversimplified parameters (Salcioglu et al., 2017).

Legislation utilizing PTSD criteria for determining intimate partner trauma is problematic (Candela, 2016; Salcioglu et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Legislative statutes limit PTSD symptomology or DV related trauma to physical violence (Candela,

2016). Those whom perceive trauma experience, including from implicit abuse forms, can potentially help provide theoretical victim classification, identification, and treatment improvements (Birdsall et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Empirical context, accurate identification, and effective treatment implications for IPA targets can potentially be enriched by continued research data.

Researchers have pressed for a paradigm shift regarding DV connotation severity (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016). Adjusted terminology, such as domestic terrorism, has instead been used in literature reviews and empirical studies focusing on DV (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016; Little, 2017). Everyday domestic terrorism presence and prevalence is a microcosm representing broader global terrorism perpetuating societal control elements through fear (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016; Little, 2017). The link between, and divergent realities of, everyday DV or global violence is an increasingly relevant issue needing further research (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016; Little, 2017).

Potential contributions made by critical perspective advance IPA survivor narratives advancing efforts toward positive social change (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2017). The weight and gravity of traumatic bonding requires empirical scrutiny. Faulty relationships fueled and fed by maladaptive attachment, emotional enmeshment, and abusive relational addiction, not nourished by it, is complex (Godbout et al., 2017). Actual attachment, enmeshment, and addiction to abusive dynamics prevalence remains insufficiently identified or understood (Munoz et al., 2017).

Relational addiction nor implicit abuse criteria are standardized, the ill-defined and un-diagnosable composition contributes to elusive, ambiguous IPA comprehension

(Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). Continued qualitative research can reveal critical perspective and experience identifying discrepancies between, or amongst aggressors and victims (Godbout et al., 2017). Discrepancies include the experiences perceived by abuse targets, such as abuser patterns for asserting control, or reacting to conflict. Incongruities also include victim factors for subjecting to behavioral violence.

Summary

Abuse has been the exhaustive focus of empirical examination for decades. The bulk of empirical research has been relegated to quantitative orientation for key empirical conclusions (Oka et al., 2016). Need for qualitative exploration is indicated (Ali et al., 2016; Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016). The study was intended to promote and bolster victim advocacy. Victim research provides data for how women describe maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and relational addiction to abusive partners or abusive relationships. The study focus was on attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit abuse. Qualitative interviews were conducted with female IPA survivors for subjective perspectives and lived experiences.

Qualitative IPA victim exploration is still needed for legislating and treating maladaptive attachment (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017), enmeshed identity (Adjei, 2017a; O'Doherty et al., 2016), and implicit abuse experiences (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Dyadic features (Oka et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016) and addiction components (Fisher, Xu, Aron, & Brown, 2016; Zou, Song, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016) may improve legal designation (Candela, 2016; Mills et al., 2018; Reicher, 2017),

clinical application (Notestine et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016), or law enforcement intervention (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gadd & Corr, 2017; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017) of IPA.

Future research implications can potentially help inform revised or improved definitions, conceptual frameworks, and standardized criteria (Ali et al., 2016; Birdsall et al., 2017). Criteria is needed for diagnosing relational addiction (Shah et al., 2016), trauma from implicit abuse (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016), and attachment to abusive dynamics (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Nevala et al., 2017; Park, 2016). The study was an exploratory analysis into women's subjective perspectives and experiences concerning attachment, identity, and implicit relational abuse. Traumatic bonding applicability was analyzed, specifically power asymmetry, paradoxical attachment, and intermittent abuse.

Traumatic bonding theory and corresponding conceptual framework is reviewed in Chapter 2. Female narratives were documented, then thematically analyzed from a standardized questionnaire and semi-structured interviewing. Attachment styles, implicit traumas, coercive control tactics, injury risks, and cyclical trauma bonds are explained more fully in subsequent sections. Victim identity, abuser attachment, and relational addiction are apprised as these constructs relate to IPA.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Females experiencing IPA can fall victim to the persisting, injurious, and cyclical nature of relational maltreatment. The qualitative inquiry was designed for examining perspectives of attachment bonds, identity conflicts, and implicit experiences for women braving IPA. Attachment insecurity has been strongly correlated to abusive intimate relationships (Curtis et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). Researchers have also indicated implicit maltreatment presence and prevalence (Grana et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017), female victim injury risk (Messing et al., 2017; Notestine et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016), and the recurrent, cyclical nature of trauma bonds (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Park, 2016).

A comprehensive review of attachment theory is concisely analyzed within IPA context throughout the remainder of Chapter 2. Implicit abuse aspects, female victim injury risk, and cyclical harm examination are introduced. Dyadic features of insecure attachment and aggression (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016) are presented. Phenomenological constructivism was used to explore qualitative studies regarding coping strategies (Crann & Barata, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Sherrill et al., 2016) and victim identity issues (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Described in these experiences are survivor perspectives for staying in the relationship (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Velonis et al., 2017), barriers to seeking help (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Murray et al., 2018), recovering from the abuse (Toews & Bermea, 2017), and transitioning to nonviolent partnerships (Kern, 2017).

Literature Search Strategy

Broad concepts were identified and keyed into search databases. The first terms were *intimate partner violence*, *intimate partner abuse*, *relationship abuse*, *battered women* and *relationship violence, relationship addiction, abusive love, abused women*. Two main databases were used, Thoreau and ProQuest Central. These two databases house compiled articles from Elton B. Stephens Co. host, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and SAGE Premier. A third database, the dissertation and theses database within ProQuest Central, was also used to examine the most recent dissertation submissions pertinent to IPA. Databases were accessed through Walden University library resources.

Filters were gradually included as searches were tailored for more refined, specific concepts. Aforementioned descriptors were eventually paired with the following terms: *coercive control*, *traumatic bonding*, *attachment*, *love*, and *implicit abuse*. More advanced searches paired key words together. *Attachment and aggression*, *abuse and codependency*, *emotional abuse and control*, *IPA nature and prevalence*, *IPA impact and consequences*, *trauma and IPA, female victims and IPA, risk factors and IPA*, *narrative phenomenology and battered women*, and, *qualitative research and IPA*.

The iterative search process did not include a filter for dates so seminal articles could be determined. The first search was for trauma bonds, which produced a study conducted by Dutton and Painter (1993). Subsequent searches were filtered for studies from 2014 to 2018, then within 2016 and 2018. Minimal qualitative studies specific to traumatic bonding and abusive relationships exist. Key quantitative researchers have

acknowledged the need for qualitative data (Munoz et al., 2017; Nevala, 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016).

Deliberate attention was paid to definitional constructs. Domestic violence is referred to as both IPV and IPA in the literature. The term and reference to IPV was excluded from the research parameters. The identified core IPA feature includes violent and nonviolent means for controlling, manipulating, and abusing. Victims experiencing violence, either intimate partner or domestic, are examined under the IPA purview.

Conceptual Foundation

Traumatic bonds are an intricately constructed reflection of attachment, enmeshment, and identification (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016). Traumatic bonding is the attachment formed from victim to victimizer initiating during cyclical cohabitation then separation, and congealing throughout the relationship duration (Tani et al., 2016). Traumatic bonding requires both a dominator and a subordinate (Messing et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016). Low self-esteem is negatively correlated with trauma symptoms and victim attachment to the abuser (Bartholomew, Cobb, & Dutton, 2015; Godbout et al., 2017; Hamel, Jones, Dutton, & Graham-Kevan, 2015). Abuse intermittency, power differentials, and delayed attachment have a direct influence on women staying in, or returning to abusive dynamics (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Tani et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016).

Cyclical harm, power imbalance, and increased cruelty tolerance contribute to target attachment to the abuser not weakening or diminishing even after relationship termination (Birdsall et al., 2017; Tani et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Coercive

control tactics are a prominent feature necessary for traumatic bonding (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). Aggressor tactics condition the target to the expectation of coercion, manipulation, and autonomy suppression (Candela, 2016; Nevala, 2017; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018). Victimhood morphs into dependency (Birdsall et al., 2017), and the abuser's love mimicries reinforce the victim's trauma bond (Shah et al., 2016).

Intimate abusers commonly display emotional vulnerability coupled with volatile reactivity (Bartholomew et al., 2015). Abuse instigators respond aggressively toward intimate partners in an effort to control intimacy when perceiving abandonment (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Corvo & Dutton, 2015; Godbout et al., 2017). Abusers exhibit dominating, controlling tendencies, coercively requiring submission, subservience, and self-doubt from the victim (Godbout et al., 2017). These relational characteristics allow the tormentor to sustain ego integrity by maintaining continual conflict (Bartholomew et al., 2015). Continual relationship conflict pushes the victim closer to capitulation, complaisance, acquiescence, and conformity (Grosz, 2018).

Internal arousal for profile batterers is cyclical in nature, recurrently prompting aggressive responsiveness (Corvo & Dutton, 2015; Zou et al., 2016). The perpetrator exploits vulnerabilities (Mills et al., 2018; Velonis et al., 2017), weakens and diminishes resistance (Chester & DeWall, 2018; Kelly & Westmarland, 2016), promotes emotional dependency (Birdsall et al., 2017; Grosz, 2018), and coerces compliance to demands with credible threats (Nevala, 2017; Walby & Towers, 2018). Coercive control provides contextual descriptors for traumatic bonding theory and has been corroborated as a conceptual foundation (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Dichter, Thomas, Crits-Cristoph,

Ogden, & Rhodes, 2018; Eckstein, 2016; Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Coercive control tactics, involving indirect manipulation, create cognitive distortions (Eckstein, 2016; Little, 2017; Mills et al., 2018; Tani et al., 2016) and dissonance in the victim (Adjei, 2017b; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Grosz, 2018; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

The Grip and Graft of Traumatic Bonding

Three primary abuser maneuvers cause traumatic bonding, self-punishment neutralization, cognitive distortions, and irrational beliefs (Dutton, 2007, p. 62). Self-punishment neutralization is operationalized as mental reconstruction (p. 63). Aggressors capitalize on victim blaming, external factor fixation, severity minimization, comparative validation, moral justification, responsibility diffusion, partner dehumanization, or selective memory retention (p. 63). Cognitive distortions are tactics for supporting anger (p. 65). Abusers make arbitrary inferences, engage in selective abstraction, overgeneralization, magnification, personalization, dichotomous thinking, or hostile attributions (p. 65). Irrational beliefs are methods for fueling anger (p. 67). Perpetrators exaggerate aversive stimuli or situations, have frustration intolerance, display absolute beliefs, demandingness, and attribute total worth based on superficialities (p. 67).

Maladaptive attachment, poor self-esteem, and trauma symptoms converge the relationship bond, gripping and grafting women to their tormentors (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Traumatic bonding is not singularly prompted by either emotional or physical injury (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Women possess a vulnerability to intimate partner victimization through gender subordination (Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Emotional and physical

torment are interconnected mechanisms establishing, then maintaining abusers controlling domination (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). Intimate continuous, recurring, emotional battering and coercive control is the prominent victim experience offset by counteractive physical battering (Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

Emergent themes from spousal victims include the abusers exhibiting a dual personality (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Traumatic bonding grip resides in the aggressor contrition phase following an abusive incident (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Reicher, 2017). Women can be seduced into colluding with perpetrators by denying or minimizing harm (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Kern, 2017). Traumatically bonded women confuse romantic love with coerced loyalty, leading to excuses, denials, minimizations, or justifications (Grosz, 2018). The bond grip is born of victim denial or helplessness (Salcioglu et al., 2017). The implicitly injuring, maladaptively attaching, identity enmeshing of traumatic bonds incites the revolving return to maltreatment (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Shah et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016).

Implicit violence is categorized by demands, coercion, and surveillance, generating greater impact than physical violence (Nevala, 2017). Psychological abuse more strongly correlates to a battered woman's poor self-esteem than the experience of physical violence (Candela, 2016). There is a predominance of psychological abuse in debilitating the recipient (Mills et al., 2018). Gas lighting is a coercive strategy used by abusers to cognitively disrupt targets with confusion (Dutton, 2007, p. 75; Grosz, 2018). Psychic numbing is a self-defensive response for victims after repeated trauma exposure (Gagnon et al., 2017; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Blunting is a means of psychic

numbing managed through emotional and social disengagement, protection from aversive arousal and forced experiences (Smith et al., 2016).

There is a paradoxical experience, an elevated cognitive dissonance for the woman seeking comfort from the source of their distress (Adjei, 2017b; Chester & DeWall, 2018; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Torres et al., 2016). Abuser behaviors, both assaultive and coercive, involve injury, deprivation, stalking, or threatening (Salcioglu et al., 2017; Umubyeyi et al., 2016). Battering is perpetrated by aggressors to assert control and affirm power over the targets (Notestine et al., 2017). Perpetrator actions indicate a lack of empathy or willingness to have empathy for the victim in the relationship (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Empathic accuracy requires precision of labeling, aptitude for mirroring, and dyadic attunement to partner communication or receptiveness (Hinnekens, Vanhee, De Schryver, Ickes, & Verhofstadt 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016).

Nonviolent behaviors range from denying affection or intimacy, intimidating through volume level or object destruction, restricting with controlling demands, or falsely accusing by victim blaming (Tougas et al., 2016, p. 198). Perceived, or actual social stigmatization isolates abuse victims from external support, or from a more positive group identity (Kern, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Components of stigma include blame, shame, discrimination, status damage, and isolation (Murray et al., 2018). The societal stigma of remaining in a harmful relationship enslaves a woman to her private reality (Meyer, 2016), and contributes to absent agency in seeking help (Kern, 2017; Murray et al., 2018). Learned helplessness facilitates either acceptance of the

abusive relationship, or hopelessness instigating self-harm or suicidality (Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016).

Societal expectations, negative stigmas, and gender normatives have ingrained feminine passivity by normalizing female submission to alpha counterparts (Grosz, 2018). Stigma involves female internalization of victimization, reasons for not reporting maltreatment, or fear the abusers will not incur legal ramifications (Murray et al., 2018). Culture socializes female preparation to withstand inequality and maltreatment (Grosz, 2018). Legal engagement post separation may also prolong experiences of coercive control, stigmatization, or secondary victimization (Douglas, 2018). Excessive litigation drains financial resources, requires repeated disclosure of traumatic details, and involves lengthy time spent in court (Douglas, 2018).

Formative dyadic attachment has been implicated as a powerful influence in attachment style formation, and subsequent attachment styles associated with IPA (Godbout et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016). Previous research on implicit IPA has included dyadic attachment (Tougas et al., 2016; Curtis et al., 2017) and perception investigation (Gagnon et al., 2017; Straus & Gozjolko, 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Issues have arisen from measures identifying overly broad psychologically abusive tactics (Curtis et al., 2017; Eckstein, 2016; Salcioglu et al., 2017). More concerted research is needed for exploring the complexities of victim attachment, identity, and implicit abuse experiences.

Research most related to this study are qualitatively oriented with methodological approaches designed for thematically coding IPA female victim responses (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Crann & Barata, 2016; Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer,

2016; Murray et al., 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017; Velonis et al., 2017). The following studies discussed have applicable concepts, such as why women stay in abusive relationships (Salcioglu et al., 2017; Torres et al., 2016), and how women identify as victims (Kern, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Additional concepts reviewed include what coping strategies women employ while surviving abuse (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Sherrill et al., 2016), and how survivors recover (Crann & Barata, 2016; Kern, 2017; Toews & Bermea, 2017).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Implicit Abuse

Physical violence, aggression, harm, and injury is not necessarily synonymous with IPA dynamics (Ali et al., 2016; Grana et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Verbal, psychological, and emotional maltreatment from IPA male perpetrators is the reaction to conflict, propelled by anger (Grana et al., 2016). The experience of anger does not exclusively result in physical aggression toward an intimate partner, as nonphysical elements exist in abusive relationships (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Neal & Edwards, 2017). Male perpetrators of abuse are more than physically dangerous, inflicting damage multi-dimensionally (Candela, 2016; Nevala, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Physical violence threats, actual physical violence, dominant-isolative psychological aggression, and emotional-verbal psychological abuse are co-occurrences (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Curtis et al., 2017).

Cognitive conflict and dissonance have been identified as an important thematic distinction for female IPA victims (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Abused women from long-term relationships articulate a duality of experiences (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Subjective descriptors romance, intimacy, and love have been found to instigate identity fracturing when coupled with subjective descriptors violence, injury, or maltreatment (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Duality of the abuse experience is a layered explanation for women withstanding harm from intimate partners (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016).

Reasons for remaining in an abusive relationship force the victim to accept the relationship reality by rebuffing any cognitive dissonance (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). The victim fixates on positive relationship aspects, while simultaneously minimizing negative facets (Adjei, 2017a). Women with a positive self-image at the onset of the maltreatment, may engage in augmented distortions, minimizations, or denials to balance the discrepancies between self-perception and cognitive dissonance (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Relationship denial forms from cultural or external indicators promoting the social pressures to project an image (Adjei, 2017a), and leaving the relationship elevates cognitive dissonance arousal (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Years, time, and effort expended into the relationship can entrench victim belief in enduring the abuse to sustain relationship continuity (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

Coping strategies are widely accepted as conceptual constructs for female IPA survivors (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gagnon et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Women withstanding, and surviving IPA employ fluid adaptive coping tactics for managing a

relationship reality embroiled with implicit, as well as explicit abuse manifestations (Gagnon, Lee, & DePrince, 2017). Adaptive coping strategies, such as nuanced situational risk awareness (Sherrill et al., 2016) and resiliency (Crann & Barrata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017), have been qualitatively explored.

Coping strategies depend on circumstance, perception, and resources (Crann & Barata, 2016; Messing et al., 2017; Munoz et al., 2017). When victim arousal is heightened, accurate sensitivity to threatening stimuli is possible, even if only subtle danger-risk cues are present (Sherrill et al., 2016). Victims are aware of contextual dynamics regarding the abusive relationship (Sherrill et al., 2016). Active coping strategies include either mending or dismantling the relationship (Birdsall et al., 2017). The most indicated coping strategy, intentional avoidance, is defined as active coping attempts for minimizing or thwarting perpetrator reactivity or escalation (Godbout et al., 2017; Mills et al., 2018; Pill et al., 2017). Avoidance is the tendency to assume responsibility for negotiating and offsetting aggressor behavior to achieve relational balance or equilibrium (Gagnon et al., 2017).

The most prominent situational risk theme is recognizing abusers verbal behavior, the specific word choice, verbally aggressive communication, name-calling, or confrontational language (Sherrill et al., 2016). Risk anticipation requires keen perception of an abuser's tendencies and capabilities (Messing et al., 2017; Sherrill et al., 2016). Ability to anticipate risk does not prevent being assaulted, it can though influence cognitive processes motivating relationship termination (Sherrill et al., 2016), or avoiding cohabitation as a protective barrier (Messing et al., 2017). Researchers exploring victims

who become survivors have pinpointed resilience as the vital coping component necessary for facilitating the shift (Crann & Barata, 2016; Pill et al., 2017). Resiliency traverses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral planes (Crann & Barata, 2016, p. 860).

Victim identity and IPA. Methods taken by IPA victims for conforming to the abuser demands and minimizing the danger risk, also compromise how she views herself (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Self-concept, self-identity, self-reference are constructs shaping and shifting throughout an individual's lifetime (Eckstein, 2016). Identity perspectives are adaptive, self-image alters as a relationship transforms (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Self-measurements of regard, estimation, and worth are gauged, then influenced by relational stress, powerlessness, or social isolation (Kern, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Partner abuse exposes women to revolving contact with maladaptively attaching, emotionally enmeshing dynamics buttressing victim identity (Eckstein, 2016; Gagnon et al., 2017).

Women of IPA gradually develop an abuse identity, a fracturing sense of self met with overwhelming shame, necessitating maltreatment concealment to preserve a less abject public identity (O'Doherty et al., 2016, p. 234). Chaotic, conflicting, and destabilizing relational dynamics successfully erode reality clarity, fueling the formation of a marred identity moored by inertia (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Survival instinct prompts utilization of self-preservation methods disassociating victims from identifying as such (Kern, 2017). Tactics for minimizing, blaming, and denying are practiced by victims themselves, to protect against identity confusion collapse within a reprehensible relationship reality (Eckstein, 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Self-blame, shame, or

alienation conditions maladaptive cognitive or behavioral avoidance strategies, reinforcing retributive victimization risk (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Victimization severity affects the stigma management strategy used by the abused (Eckstein, 2016). Stigma and shame for women is not just from experiencing IPA. Stigma and shame is from revealing the IPA (Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). Personal identity disconnection is common for abused women (Kern, 2017), and greater harm severity correlates more strongly to defensive withdrawal, retreat, avoidance or dissociation (Eckstein, 2016; Mills et al., 2018). A common theme articulated by abused women involves deliberate reality disruptions (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Mercurial, capricious abusers repetitiously instigate confusing, conflating contradictions edging targets to the brink of sanity (Grosz, 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Repeat exposure to reality distortions leads to victim self-consciousness, wherein self-doubt increases regarding judgment and recognizing reality (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016).

Women experiencing severe physical violence or psychological cruelty form a stigmatized identity (Eckstein, 2016). Control-based relationships of severe physical or psychological maltreatment center on coercion, reflecting strong stigmatized identification for victims (Eckstein, 2016). Societal norms and cultural biases might have influential power over women's decisions to seek out help or seek out hiding the abusive experiences (Notestine et al., 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Established binary gender expectations perpetuates gender inequality, and resigned acceptance of violent conflict resolution (O'Doherty et al. 2016). The normalization of victim blaming conditions women to manage the abusive reality by remaining silent (Notestine et al., 2017).

Injury Risk

When physical violence, aggression, and abuse is present, injury risk is significantly high for women (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Notestine et al., 2017; Park, 2016). Eighty percent of IPA victims are female (Park, 2016), and 82% of violent crime is committed against women (Walby & Towers, 2018). Women are 2 to 3 times more likely than men to be harmed, and 7 to 14 times more likely to be seriously injured (Park, 2016). High frequency IPA victims are disproportionately women, and the likelihood of re-traumatization correlates to greater injury risk (Walby & Towers, 2018). Intimately abused victims experience greater frequency, severity, and variations of violence (Straus & Gozjolko, 2016; Nevala, 2017). Abused women comprise 80% of intimate partner homicide (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017), roughly 1500 deaths annually (Park, 2016).

Millions of female IPA victims visit emergency rooms every year (Park, 2016). Women have elevated risk for the most severe IPA experiences, known as battering (Notestine et al., 2017). Battering is the concentrated, longitudinal bombardment of physical, sexual, and emotional violence (Notestine et al., 2017). Battering frequency and severity are necessary for properly classifying IPA types within specific contexts (Hamby, 2016). A verifiable, measurable differentiation for injury risk exists with cohabitating, unmarried women versus married women (Wong et al., 2016). Unmarried, cohabitating women are at least 2 times as likely to endure head, neck, torso, limb, or facial injury, and 2 times as likely to sustain injuries in multiple locations, with more than one physical abuse type (Wong et al., 2016).

Intimate terrorists are primarily male (Hamby et al., 2016; Hayes & Jeffries, 2016; Straus & Gozjolko, 2016). Nonviolent women involved with intimate terrorists are at least 5 times as likely to be injured (Straus & Gozjolko, 2016). Intimate terrorism exposes women to more varied violence types, more severe violence, and a higher average of violent incidents (Eckstein, 2016; Nevala, 2017). Coercively controlling intimate terrorism is experienced by victims as interspersed violent and nonviolent behaviors by the aggressor intent on forcing submission (Ali et al., 2016; Gadd & Corr, 2017). Specific contexts for operationalizing coercive control include violence frequency or severity, harassment or violence experienced after separation, instilled fear, and perceived future harm threat (Nevala, 2017).

There are established attachment and aggression risk factors for IPA female victims (Godbout et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2016). Female safety is threatened exponentially when violence is not bilaterally reciprocated (Smith et al., 2016). Fear, risk, and isolation may prompt reactionary violence to mitigate injury, as bilateral violence is statistically higher when recipients are subjected to coercively controlling abuse (Dichter et al., 2018). Female IPA victims, and survivors, have elevated risk for depression, self-harm, self-injury, suicide, or substance abuse (Godbout et al., 2017; Mills et al., 2018; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016).

Intimate violence against women escalates suicide risk (Kavak et al., 2018). Trauma victimization increases probability for developing PTSD symptomology, while also raising self-harm and suicidality (Mills et al., 2018; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Reicher, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Deliberate self-harm falls under the parameters for

reckless or destructive PTSD conduct, aiding in temporary avoidance strategies to mitigate symptomology or suicidality (Smith et al., 2016). Self-harm risk and suicide vulnerability provide alternative explanations for high-risk behaviors, illustrating why women remain in abusive relationships instead of seeking help (Mills et al., 2018; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016).

Female empathy has been found to negatively correlate to victimization (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Female victim experience of feeling guilt mediates the relationship between excessive emotional, relational dependency and increased abuse tolerance (Cala, Trigo, & Saavedra, 2016). Dependency, loyalty, and guilt ensnares women to remain in the relationship, return to the relationship, or drop legal proceedings against the abuser (Cala et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Guilt correlates to negative stigma and emotional dependence for female targets (Cala et al., 2016).

Abuser attachment and IPA. Specific attachment style fits within abusive relationship context (Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Wright, 2017). There is a link between insecure attachment and relational aggression (Curtis et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Insecure attachment positively correlates with relational aggression (Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016), and relational aggression positively correlates to physical aggression (Oka et al., 2016; Park, 2016). Insecure attachment subtype may better determine the differences in behavioral aggression displayed by perpetrators (Park, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). Discrepant results of relational versus physical aggression could be explained with further research into

insecure attachment subsets (Curtis et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). Avoidantly insecure males may be less likely to engage in physical violence (Wright, 2017).

Insecurely attached males engage in relational aggression, physical aggression and violence (Curtis et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Park, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). An increase in psychological aggression corresponds with decreased love intensity (Grana et al., 2016). An abuser's perceived support from the victim partner (Tougas et al., 2016), along with relationship satisfaction (Curtis et al., 2017), may reconcile attachment subtype with relational aggression perpetration. Avoidant insecure attachment influences both perceived lack of partner support, and subsequent psychological aggression (Tougas et al., 2016). Higher avoidant attachment has been found to predict poor partner support perception, resulting in more frequent psychological aggression (Tougas et al., 2016).

Bilateral aggression can either be instigated by, or informed with empathic accuracy (Hinnekens et al., 2016). Empathic accuracy is the ability to correctly interpret partner perspective or emotional experience (Hinnekens et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Accurate empathy requires precision of labeling, aptitude for mirroring, as well as dyadic attunement to a partner's communication approach and receptiveness (Hinnekens et al., 2016). A decrease in empathic accuracy correlates with increased psychological and physical aggression (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016).

Partner abuse bidirectionality has led researchers to conclude motivations for convicted perpetrators are context specific, not gender-specific (Curtis et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016). Multiple motive categories at varying degrees function as the stimulus for DV perpetration (Gadd & Corr, 2017). Different sample populations validate varying

motivations. Self-defense may differentiate female offenders from male offenders within incarcerated populations (Pill et al., 2017). Homogeny among IPA perpetrators may be too simplistic a classification, as personalities and motivations may not align for every violence incident or form of aggression (Ali et al., 2016; Gadd & Corr, 2017).

Cyclical Nature of Trauma Bonds

There is a chronically cyclical pattern between cohabitation, then, separation for women in abusive relationships (Little, 2017; Park, 2016; Reicher, 2017). An inability to successfully stay away from the abuser contributes to the prolongation of victimization (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Women make multiple attempts to leave the relationship before successful, permanent separation, while others are unable to ever separate (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). The traumatic vortex revolves the trapped, then abandoned experience mirroring and perpetuating the maltreatment cycle, creating a maelstrom of emotional attachment mired in cognitive confusion (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016).

Abused women also experience tertiary ramifications, as individuals react to the victim's primary and secondary IPA symptoms (Eckstein, 2016). Culturally driven narratives about identity incorporate relational and gender stigmas (Eckstein, 2016; McCleary et al., 2016). Abuse stigma connotes negative images, reinforcing victim blame or shame, involving external, internal discrediting and invalidating (Eckstein, 2016). Stigma management requires women to juggle multiple, and at times competing identities, perpetuating the harm cycle (Eckstein, 2016). Nonphysical power and control manipulations by abusers create greater psychological damage (Ali et al., 2016).

Male aggressors engage in psychological tactics for minimizing, detaching from, and distorting information (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). All mechanisms demonstrative of lacking empathy and serving to disorient women who are emotionally invested in the relationship (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Batterers possess incredible sensitivity to intimacy perceptions (Shah et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Fear of abandonment prompts abusers to pull targets closer. A sense of overwhelm stimulates the aggressor to push the victim away, resulting in a continuous push and pull experience for victims (Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Prominent emotional experiences hinge on rage and jealousy, reflecting men preoccupied with being in power, unable to accept powerlessness (Oka et al., 2016; Wright, 2017).

Abuser abdication of responsibility, projection, and blame displacement onto the target causes emotional and cognitive dissonance (Gagnon et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Cognitive dissonance results from conflicted attitudes or behaviors creating an inconsistency between thoughts, actions, or words (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017, p. 478). Intimate partner abusers employ psychological tactics for intimidation, isolation, and control eliciting fear, compliance, and submission (Candela, 2016; Eckstein, 2016). Dissonance for IPA victims might be reconciled by distorting, minimizing, or ignoring negative opinions about the relationship (Grosz, 2018; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). When systemic, reoccurring psychological trauma is coupled with physical aggression, fear or a sense of helplessness can normalize women to violence, hostility, and control (Salcioglu et al., 2017). This normalization eliminates personal identity, conditioning victims to withstand, or return to the abuse (Crann & Barata, 2016; Salcioglu et al., 2017).

Aggression severity is correlated with relationship dissatisfaction and relationship dissolution (Curtis et al., 2017). Dyadic psychological aggression strongly predicts both the perpetrator and victim dissolving the relationship (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017). Female commitment to an abusive partner is significantly correlated to relationship satisfaction (Adjei, 2017b; Curtis et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Commitment positively correlates to mechanisms for minimization or injury denial, and significantly correlates to victim forgiveness of the aggressor (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Infrequent moderate physical aggression does not influence intent for dissolving the relationship as does frequent psychological aggression (Curtis et al., 2017).

Recurrent victimization affects female relational well-being and satisfaction (Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016). Relationship commitment and satisfaction decreases, as abuse frequency increases (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017). Severity of violence is negatively correlated to forgiveness (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017), and perception of experience influences victim decision to stay or resolve to leave (Crann & Barata, 2016; Kern, 2017; Meyer, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). Subjective appraisal of empirically objective abuse experiences dictates victim commitment to the relationship (Adjei, 2017b; Curtis et al., 2017), and forgiveness of the abuser (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Severe physical aggression prompts less simplistic cost benefit analysis as physical safety threats are legitimatized, and relationship satisfaction becomes less motivating when deciding to stay or leave an abusive relationship (Curtis et al., 2017).

Relational addiction and IPA. Addiction has unrestrained proclivities, persistently infiltrating populations across the United States, and throughout the world

(Pill et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Researchers have indicated legitimate commonality, even reciprocity, between addiction processes and maladaptive relationship attachments (Fisher et al., 2016; Zou, Song, Zhang, & Zhang, 2016). Addiction to intimate relationships still lacks sufficient research though (Fisher et al., 2016). Absent codified agreement regarding criteria for relational addiction represents a prominent, relevant issue (Shah et al., 2016).

Relational addiction is insufficient for diagnostic criteria as a clinical disorder. It is also not categorized as an official behavioral addiction, due to the lack of sufficient systematic study (Fisher et al., 2016). Continued research is needed to verify addicting intimate relationships (Fisher et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2016). The defining characteristics or explanatory variables for relational addiction are sparsely represented in research (Fisher et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2016). There is no empirical consensus regarding genuine love coexisting with intimate abuse (Shah et al., 2016). Traumatic bonding does not require nor exclude a female victim from loving the abuser (Shah et al., 2016).

Although there is continued scientific community resistance labeling one form of addiction to romantic love, researchers have identified chemical correlates between feeling love and using substances (Fisher et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2016). The same cyclical pattern from substance addiction can be seen in relationship addiction (Fisher et al., 2016). This cyclical pattern includes initial euphoria with cravings and results in emotional or physical dependence (Fisher et al., 2016). Subsequent separation results in withdrawal symptoms and behaviors, along with increased potential for relapsing back into the relationship (Fisher et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2016).

Diagnostic criteria for drug intoxication and drug withdrawal can be seen with observable traits accompanying relational addiction (Zou et al., 2016). Diagnostic relevancy of impaired control, social impairment, risky behavior, and pharmacological criteria for addiction is evident when examining abusive relationships (Zou et al., 2016). The overlap between substance and relational addiction is also evident regarding both reward prediction and experiencing urge strength increase (Zou et al., 2016).

Empirically Explaining IPA

Intimate violence has historically been simplistically researched and explained (Ali et al., 2016; Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016). Wife assault, traditionally and societally, is predominantly overlooked or overtly looked away from (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Attachment theory, psychosocial development, social learning theory, and feminist theory were all developed, from the 1970s through the 1990s, to attempt scientific explanations for female submission to abusive partners (Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016). Research on this topic has been relegated and restricted to criminal justice system populations, limiting focus on perpetrator or victim pathology and blame (Meyer, 2016).

Homosexual relationship abuse, patriarchal cultures with lower violence rates, and DV perpetrated by women are all aspects of IPA challenging one-dimensional explanations (Ali et al., 2016). Empirical researchers have provided data evidencing bilateral violence perpetrated by both partners (Neal & Edwards, 2017; Straus & Gozjolko, 2016). Women who fight back or defend themselves have been misleadingly labeled abuse co-perpetrators and not actual victims (Dichter et al., 2018). Men are also

targeted by intimate abusers. Bilateral abuse is gender asymmetric though, as male perpetration and female victimization is the prominent IPA constellation (Dichter et al., 2018; Hamby, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Interpersonal components impact perpetuation and experience of physical and psychological IPA (Chester & DeWall, 2018; Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016).

Intimate terrorism, developed in the 1990s, is characterized by coercively controlling violence intricately woven into the relationship dynamics (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Oka et al., 2016). Violence is utilized as the strategic lynchpin for perpetrators to exhibit control and master manipulation (Straus & Gozjolko, 2016). Physical violence is coupled with varying nonviolent control strategies predominantly comprising coercive and implicit tactics (Eckstein, 2016; Nevala, 2017). Nonviolent control strategies include emotional abuse, verbal threats, physical intimidation, electronic monitoring, and victim blame (Nevala, 2017; Wright, 2017).

Male intimate terrorists orchestrate coercive control to make targets feel inadequate and fearful (Nevala, 2017; Straus & Gozjolko, 2016). Infidelity is one coercive strategy orchestrated by abusers to both punish and deter partner resistance, retribution, or resolve to leave the relationship (Chester & DeWall, 2018). Perpetrator violence intention is insufficient to coerce victim compliance (Ali et al., 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Credible threats and convincing behavioral displays are necessary for victim acquiescence (Nevala, 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). Intimate terrorism perpetrators exert more than aggression against subordinate partners, there is a pulsing undercurrent of gender hostility (Tani et al., 2016).

Instigative, antagonistic, and provocative behaviors by abusers consistently create dehumanizing female objectification (Chester & DeWall, 2018). Both misogyny and binary gender constructs support the male perpetrator-female victim paradigm (Gadd & Corr, 2017). Men are the primary perpetrators amongst heterosexual couples (Curtis et al., 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). Men are statistically more likely to inflict injury and far less likely to be injured (Hamby, 2016; Pill et al., 2017). An established higher risk for female victim injury reinforces classifying intimate terrorism as predominantly representative of male abusers (Notestine et al., 2017; Park, 2016).

Empirical researchers detailing IPA relevance have established the persisting prominent issues regarding continued DV hinge on legalities (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). IPA is represented by multifaceted experiences including violent and nonviolent consequences (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016; Meyer, 2016). Legal statutes subjugate women to definitions of abuse, and to the varied, inconsistent state or jurisdictional specifications for what deems a woman an IPA victim (Birdsall et al., 2017; Candela, 2016; Hamby, 2016; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016). Most states (two-thirds) require physical violence or imminent danger for criminal classification, no state includes coercive control in DV statutes (Candela, 2016). There is ambiguity in identifying, then classifying psychological IPA forms (Mills et al., 2018).

Deficiencies in research remain misleading and limited, without an agreed upon classification for what legally or clinically constitutes criterion for implicit IPA (Adjei, 2017a; Candela, 2016; Mills et al., 2018; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Psychological abuse encompasses cognitive and emotional impairment, wherein the damaging nonphysical

maltreatment perpetrated against victims diminishes protective factors (Mills et al., 2018). Discrepant social, cultural, or relational boundaries determine what behaviors are considered permissible versus abusive (Mills et al., 2018). Abused women are viewed as depraved deviants instead of vulnerable victims (Grosz, 2018). Disparaging beliefs may improve by normalizing female empowerment and deconstructing heteronormative gender roles promoting female submission (Schuler & Nazneen, 2018).

Empirical researchers and literature reviewers have attempted reconciling the legal, clinical, and law enforcement variances relevant to IPA (Birdsall et al., 2017; Candela, 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017; Shah et al., 2016). Research toward a universal recognition and understanding of what relational abuse comprises, along with how IPA is classified, have been advocative objectives (Eckstein, 2016; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017). Research dedicated to codification of what encompasses relational abuse dynamics may better inform how IPA is experienced by victims (Ali et al., 2016). Societal misperceptions or judgments about abuse have contributed to oversimplifying, reductive parameters for what is considered to be legally defined IPA (Candela, 2016; Hamby, 2016). Without unifying criteria, invisible, implicit, and subtle intimate abuse aspects need acknowledgment (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016).

Physical aggression or injury should not encompass the totality of legally defined violence, as IPA is not limited to, or only demonstrated by physical aggression and injury (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). There is police officer prejudice regarding intimate partner sexual assault without physical evidence (Johnson & Dai, 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). The same prejudice exists when officers are called to a DV scene without signs of

physical violence (O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). Officers are less likely to issue an arrest (O'Neal & Spohn, 2017), and more likely to attribute victim blame (Meyer, 2016) if presenting information does not meet likelihood of conviction criteria. Social stigma, cultural preconceptions, legislative doctrine, clinical diagnosis, or officer biases can encourage victim experience minimization when physical aggression is not a dominant relationship feature (Eckstein, 2016; Cala et al., 2016; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016).

There are varied cultural acceptances regarding wife-beating (Rajan, 2018). Disciplinary punishments are considered permissible amongst certain cultural mores, even justified (Rajan, 2018). Perceptions of how a woman performs her wifely role, for example, are admissible reasons for abuse (Rajan, 2018). Widespread myths about non-stranger assault or rape also permeate cultural norms (Megias et al., 2018). Juror beliefs about marriage and husband rights greatly influence both spousal rape or DV charges (O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). Misconceptions and biases serve to perpetuate the notion women in intimate sexual relationships cannot be raped by a partner, or women who remain with abusive partners consent to abuse (O'Neal & Spohn, 2017).

Greater attitudinal acceptance of violence against women positively correlates to ambivalent, or even hostile sexism corresponding to IPA justification (Martin-Fernandez et al., 2018). Myths include DV is a mutual occurrence, violence can be avoided if women cooperate, some women masochistically want to be controlled, abused women can just leave if they really wanted to, or female accusers are automatically believed while their counterparts are vilified (Megias et al., 2018). Prejudicial and erroneous

beliefs have seeped into prosecutorial, legislative, and judicial realms, wherein a victim's credibility is scrutinized, then summarily dismissed (O'Neal & Spohn, 2017).

A woman's perception of her legal rights may influence if she becomes an IPA victim (Zakaliyat & Susuman, 2018). Ignorance of legal rights jeopardize women to violence by 3.2 to 3.8 times (Zakaliyat & Susuman, 2018). Women, conversely, who believe in gender equality are 25 to 32% more likely to be victimized (Zakaliyat & Susuman, 2018). Isolation and disappearance of self slowly veils the victim from herself (Candela, 2016). Abused women normalize maltreatment, violence, and abuse without experience validation (Candela, 2016; Crann & Barata, 2016). Normalized skepticism for accusations or accusers reporting abuse, cultural violence normalization, and resource restrictions all contribute to the cloak of victim invisibility and silence (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Myhill & Johnson, 2016; Notestine et al., 2017).

Female victim examination. Accurate IPA prevalence is not possible to ascertain (Kelly & Westmarland, 2016; Myhill & Johnson, 2016). Continued underreporting of intimate maltreatment behind closed doors has gradually prompted more persistent and thorough research (Hamby, 2016; Reicher, 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). Research specific to battered women has lacked a cumulative and comprehensive study scope (Ali et al., 2016). There are stereotyped discrepancies in what men wield and how women yield (Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Socialization of male dominance and female traumatization has influenced violence perpetration, including perceptions regarding power differentials in abusive relationships (Oka et al., 2016; Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016). Two outcomes are certain for IPA victims, power demonstrations for

intimidation are unavoidable and cyclical violence with severity escalation is inevitable (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016).

A common thread for research studies of abused women perspective center on the construct learned helplessness (Birdsall et al., 2017; Crann & Barata, 2016). Learned helplessness was authored by Seligman in 1967 and derives from locus of control (LOC), introduced by Rotter in 1966 (Friedman & Schustack, 2016). Locus of control is acceptance and subjective belief in an internal or external force dictating outcomes (Friedman & Schustack, 2016). Locus of control in relation to identity development and beliefs in self-ability is predicated on perception of control (Friedman & Schustack, 2016). Learned helplessness within the context of intimate abuse reflects submission to an external LOC preventing any option for leaving the relationship.

Powerlessness, learned helplessness, withheld autonomy, or inundated distress infiltrates psychosocial development, identity formation, and personal or relational identification (Friedman & Schustack, 2016, p. 137). Learned helplessness facilitates either acceptance of the abuse, or hopelessness instigating maltreatment tolerance, self-harm or suicidality (Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Increased tolerance coincides with female emotional disengagement, contributing to reality distortions and violence acceptance (Tani et al., 2016). Vulnerable identity and a damaged sense of self affects victim agency to seek out help (Adjei, 2017b; Shah et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017).

Unmarried female IPA victims are an understudied population, and their lived experiences are largely absent or not separated from married women (Grana et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2016). Examination of unmarried IPA women may assist

in filling a significant research void. Female participants during qualitative interviews have provided experiences of being controlled and manipulated by the abuser (Gadd & Corr, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Victim interview responses are used to reveal perspectives for staying in the relationship (Adjei, 2017a; Kern, 2017; Meyer, 2016). How women behaviorally mitigate or cope with the abuse (Crann & Barata, 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016) is also more aptly indicated through semi-structured interviews.

Qualitatively interviewing female survivors has provided first hand descriptions of the perilous struggle with absorbing an aggressor's unpredictable, explosive anger (Gadd & Corr, 2017). Victims simultaneously witness patterns of verbal assault escalating into physical violence and property destruction (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016). Nostalgia about favorable abuser qualities strengthens the attachment bond to the tormentor (Birdsall et al., 2017; Park, 2016), as explicitly stated by female targets (Shah et al., 2016). Blame and self-blame position these victims to attribute abusive relationship dynamics to her own behavior or inability to placate the aggressor (Crann & Barata, 2016). Verbal and physical violence intensifies over time, so continued abuse prompts dissolution (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017).

Scarce research specific to relationship satisfaction and continuity, remains an issue needing further qualitative exploration (Adjei, 2017a; Curtis et al., 2017). Why relationships continue if male perpetrators have contempt for the partner, dissatisfaction with the relationship, and if conflict with violence results in offender arrest (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017). A decrease in relationship satisfaction results in an increased chance of relationship dissolution (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017).

Less clearly determined is if relational aggression presence increases or decreases relationship dissolution probability (Curtis et al., 2017). Aggression severity specificity and degree of physical force could better characterize the aggression forms prompting efforts taken by women to dissolve the relationship (Adjei, 2017a; Curtis et al., 2017).

Spiritual belief systems validate and empower women's internal locus of control in surviving, moving forward, then recovering from IPA (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017). Female victim agency to end the abuse by leaving is an internally derived locus of control (Adjei, 2017a; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Munoz et al., 2017). Identity transition from victim to survivor orientation facilitates the necessary agency in leaving the relationship (Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). Communication skills (Eckstein, 2016; Godbout et al., 2017), not defining identity solely based on a relationship (Meyer, 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2016), and nonviolent conflict approaches (Neal & Edwards, 2017; Park, 2016) are necessary for victims to survive, overcome, then successfully leave abusive relationships.

Past criteria for resilience, such as absence of psychopathology, narrowly and discriminately limits empirical research viability (Crann & Barata, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Research on IPA severely biases data about female survival and resiliency when excluding women resonating depression, anxiety, or trauma symptomology (Birdsall et al., 2017; Crann & Barata, 2016). Identity or sense of self, not absent psychopathology, primarily contributes to the personalized resilience experience (Kern, 2017). Resiliency is fluid and on-going beyond the successful termination of an abusive relationship (Crann & Barata, 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). Survivors have indicated

empowerment is felt with economic independence, exit options, normalization of gender equality, and protection interventions by other females (Schuler & Nazneen, 2018).

Endurance complexity has impeded accurate IPA measurement and documentation (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016; Little, 2017; Porrua-Garcia et al., 2016; Reicher, 2017). Definitional inconsistency regarding prominent implicit experiences for victims have limited empirical understanding of IPA (Ali et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017; Tougas et al., 2016) and traumatic bonding phenomenon (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016). Abuse, coercive control, psychological aggression, and resiliency lack definitional, operational, or measurable consensus (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017; Pill et al., 2017). Further research is needed to more definitively interpret how external protective factors, such as resiliency, influence an elevated internal locus of hope in female IPA survivors (Crann & Barata, 2016; Munoz et al., 2017).

Gender discrepancies in emotional, relational conflict are the first justification for the proposed study to be examined through traumatic bonding theory lens. Relationship conflict generates differing emotional experiences for male perpetrators and female victims, resulting in divergent behavioral responsiveness to, and coping strategies for conflict (Tougas et al., 2016). Relational dependency leads to anger in male abusers, demonstrating significant correlation to behavioral violence, coercion, and aggression (Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). High relational dependency leads to guilt in female victims, demonstrating significant correlation to loyalty, with increased tolerance for violence, aggression, and maltreatment (Cala et al., 2016; Reicher, 2017; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Additional researchers investigating attachment style in

abusive relationships corroborate and support male abuser and female victim distinctions (Curtis et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Oka et al., 2016).

Traumatic Bonding Phenomenon

Multidimensional scrutiny of individual (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Meyer, 2016), dyadic (Godbout et al., 2017; Hinnekens et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016), and situational IPA mediators (Curtis et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Wright, 2017) is warranted. Psychological, neurobiological epistemology for IPA is evidenced by the following five features. These include psychological distress (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Murray et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2016), emotional dysregulation (Gagnon et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016), penchant for personality disorders (Neal & Edwards, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017), insecure attachment (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017), and elevated internal arousal (Mills et al., 2018; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Greater perpetrator psychopathology severity equals greater violence severity for IPA victims (Gadd & Corr, 2017).

Romantic love does not always lead to obsessive or possessive behaviors (Fisher et al., 2016). A distinguishing feature for IPA relationships involves an abuser's actual or perceived rejection activating abandonment fear, and instigating abandonment rage (Godbout et al., 2017; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). The abusive male assuages shame or fear of being rejected by subverting intimacy with aggression (Tougas et al., 2016), vulnerability with violence (Oka et al., 2016), and shame with misogyny (Gadd & Corr, 2017). Neurochemical dopamine production reinforces fixation with a desired object (Fisher et al., 2016). Rumination over rejected love causes brain activation akin to

drug craving (Fisher et al., 2016). An irrefutable connection exists between attachment style and propensity for becoming addicted to negative relational aspects (Fisher et al., 2016; Grana et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2016).

Narrative responses limit generalizability (O'Doherty et al., 2016). Narrative research can also broaden themes relevant to IPA victim experience (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Further research into locus of control awareness when experiencing trauma could better implicate role of helplessness in predicting PTSD (Munoz et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Perceived trauma severity, situational risk awareness with threat appraisal, and subsequent helplessness fuses a victim's sense of control, power, and ability to survive (Salcioglu et al., 2017). Cognitive numbing, through emotional and social disengagement, is particularly influencing with suicidal ideation by reinforcing sense of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness (Gagnon et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Relationship duration positively correlates to DV familiarity and increased suicidal ideation (Kavak et al., 2018).

This qualitative inquiry involved the exploration of a survivor's implicit abuse experiences. Continued research may improve IPA legality issues and may influence or better inform clinically (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). The duluth model of male dominance is married to patriarchal explanations for DV, limiting approach effectiveness and requiring alternate angles of explanation (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Intergenerational violence cycles via social learning theory is also a limiting explanatory model (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Violence exposure in childhood is more

likely to correlate to DV perpetration in adulthood if conduct disorder in adolescence was exhibited (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

Male IPA perpetrators reveal significantly higher insecure attachment, and significantly lower power than female counterparts (Oka et al., 2016). Inaccurate power dynamic perceptions could indicate scientific need for clinicians and therapists. Subtle, yet complex concepts of DV introduced to court ordered or voluntarily couples in therapy could prove valuable (Oka et al., 2016). Continued research utilizing standardized assessment instruments may provide an enhanced framework for qualitative participant responses (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016; Porrua-Garcia et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016).

A previously unexamined population, couples seeking therapy for relational aggression, reported an insignificant correlation between insecure attachment and relational aggression (Tougas et al., 2016). Researchers surmised clinical populations, such as couples seeking therapy, could affect the anonymity cloak, thereby increasing response acquiescence. Insecure attachment subtype avoidant was indicated with poor partner support perceptions and presence of psychological aggression, suggesting, further research is needed for investigating attachment subtypes (Tougas et al., 2016).

Future attachment research should account for cyber element inclusion given continuously evolving means of communication and social interaction (Wright, 2017). Jealousy and anger mediate both aggression perpetration and attachment anxiety subtype when examining privacy invasiveness behaviors. Anger also mediates for in-person physical aggression when examining attachment anxiety subtype (Wright, 2017).

Attachment may not be fixed, contrary to traditional research (Godbout et al., 2017). Attachment style shaped in childhood might be shifted by attachment formed in adolescent or early adulthood (Godbout et al., 2017; Wright, 2017). Malleable attachment may also influence how relationship satisfaction is experienced, as first romantic experiences can shape or shift attachment securities in adulthood (Curtis et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Participant self-report of elevated abandonment fears corresponds to elevated relationship violence (Godbout et al., 2017; Wright, 2017). Increased avoidance also corresponds to increased relational distress experiences (Mills et al., 2018; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Positive and secure attachment might serve as later protective factors for child victims of violent or abusive relationships (Godbout et al., 2017). Further research is needed to better inform the verifiable effects of early romantic attachment on subsequent romantic relationships (Godbout et al., 2017).

Attributions can provide attempts to explain why perpetration has occurred, whereas motivations can indicate why perpetration continues to occur (Neal & Edwards, 2017). Motivations for insecurely attached partners to perpetrate IPA is particularly lacking in research (Grana et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Research into victim explanations for partner violence continues to be needed, particularly explanations for nonviolent forms of abuse (Neal & Edwards, 2017). Additional dyadic factors influencing self and partner perceptions, attributions, or motivations require more research (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Hinnekens et al., 2016; Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). Attachment style (Park, 2016), coping strategies (Crann & Barata, 2016), locus of control (Munoz et al.,

2017), and perception changes based on abuse relationship stage (Ali et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016) could all valuably contribute to IPA research. Gender discrepancies concerning the link between internalized anxiety, empathy, and aggression expressions could also add to the body of research (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016).

Recognition of PTSD implications for female IPA victims could improve intervention opportunities. Treatment programs are rarely created specifically for abused women (Pill et al., 2017). Intimately abused targets engaging in deliberate self-harm have particularly tenuous voluntary therapy participation, infrequent attendance, with uncommitted duration (Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Screening for PTSD, including self-harm risk profiles and cultural sensitivity indicators, is needed for more effective IPA victim intervention (Smith et al., 2016).

Future research could qualitatively examine reciprocal violence by abused women (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Park, 2016). Further examination could determine if and why women choose to fight back in abusive relationships (Ali et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016). Continued study could also identify female victim perspective regarding bidirectional violence of either intentional self-defense, or an attempt to leave the relationship (Ali et al., 2016; Dichter et al., 2018; Hamby, 2016; Neal & Edwards, 2017). A victim's verbal or physical responsiveness to an abuser qualifies as self-defensive or antagonistic (Sherrill et al., 2016). Defensive or retaliatory violence may be utilized by IPA victims as a survival or protective strategy (Dichter et al., 2018). Absent qualitative research has examined victim experience and perception of self-defensive behaviors exacerbating or diffusing perpetrator retaliation (Sherrill et al., 2016).

Thematic analysis of proximal antecedents, as viewed and perceived by IPA survivors, can produce more precise contextual variants relevant to prevention efforts in therapeutic or treatment facilities (Sherrill et al., 2016). Greater victim experience and perspective exploration can also inform how women can better interpret discriminative stimuli. Better stimuli discrimination can determine when interpersonal conflict may turn injuriously volatile, dangerously hostile, and physically violent. Empirical documentation of situational cues elevating assault or injury risk, as identified by IPA victims, may improve traumatization by intimate partners (Sherrill et al., 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Theoretical, conceptual constructs examining and explicating implicit aspects of abusive dynamics have been explored. Victim experiences and perspectives give voice to relational attachment and maltreatment dynamics. The conceptual understanding of traumatic bonding theory can be seen in how the grip, then graft maladaptively attaches, emotionally enmeshes, and relationally addicts female targets to male aggressors. A qualitative examination of female survivor perspectives and experiences for remaining in, or returning to abuse was examined (Adjei, 2017a; Meyer, 2016; Murray et al., 2018). Coping strategies (Crann & Barata, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016), identity (O'Doherty et al., 2016; Adjei, 2017b), barriers to seeking help (McCleary-Sills et al., 2017; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017), and transition from victim to survivor (Douglas, 2018; Kern, 2017; Toews & Bermea, 2017) are key constructs capturing IPA victimization, traumatic bonding, and survival.

Research from 2016 to 2018 has indicated greater recognition of IPA existence within homosexual relationships, and bidirectional or female perpetration. Women can be reciprocally abusive as targets or purposefully abusive as perpetrators (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Shah et al., 2016). Bidirectional violence perpetration may be gender-neutral, violence injury though is still greater for women (Dichter et al., 2018; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Two-thirds of fatal and nonfatal IPA is perpetrated by men (Straus & Gozjolko et al., 2016). Research is needed for examining victim motivations for bilateral violence or control (Dichter et al., 2018).

Available research about female IPA victims contains evidence for three commonalities. There are gravely damaging implicit IPA forms (Godbout et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017). There are statistically indicated threats for injurious traumatization and elevated self-harm risk (Godbout et al., 2017; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). There are also compelling psychological tactics conditioning a cyclical familiarity for, and possible addiction to abuse for female victims (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Park, 2016). The three commonalities contribute to maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and relational abuse addiction, illustrating traumatic bonding power and permanence (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Messing et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Shani et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016).

Dyadic attachment and abuse features are integral to IPA discussions (Straus & Gozjolko, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). The relationship between insecure attachment and relational, or physical aggression, violence, or abuse (Godbout et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017) is the first IPA component.

Traumatic bonding theory understanding requires a comprehensive composite of relational dynamics, such as gender discrepancies in emotional and relational conflict (Curtis et al., 2017; Grana et al., 2016). Attachment theory conceptualization is relevant, even necessary, in identifying reasons for elevated relational aggression and physical violence in intimate relationships (Godbout et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Evident gaps in the research could be better explained through traumatic bonding.

The societal, legal influences for defining abusive relationships (Candela, 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017) and responding to DV persistence (Birdsall et al., 2017; Johnson & Dai, 2016) continues to be problematic. Conceptual and definitional inconsistencies for what constitutes violence against women have resulted in legislative and law enforcement limitations (Birdsall et al., 2017; Mills et al., 2018; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Societal constraints function as impediments for IPA victims to seek out help and successfully separate from abuse (Cala et al., 2016; Eckstein, 2016; Kern, 2017; Meyer, 2016; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2018).

This qualitative study served to focus attention on female survivor accounts of attachment, enmeshment, and implicit relational abuse experiences. Coercion, control, manipulation, isolation, intimidation, and threats were the implicit maltreatment experiences of interest. The purposive sampling of childless female IPA survivors, qualitative data collection methodology, and analytic coding strategy for thematic conclusions will be more explicitly discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Critical perspective is rooted in advocacy (Creswell, 2017). The amalgamation and interpretation of subjective experiences informs social progression regarding identified problems, themes, or issues (Creswell, 2017). Criticality for qualitative researchers prompts weighing the philosophical elements of ethicality, morality, and conclusory counter narratives to accepted cultural normatives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Partner abuse research has provided a primarily quantitative exposition and research design. Notable qualitative studies have coded the participant responses from semi-structured interviews (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Buchbinder & Barakat, 2016; Crann & Barata; 2016; Douglas, 2018; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016; Gadd & Corr, 2017; Kern, 2017; Murray et al., 2018; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017; Umubyeyi et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017).

Subjective attachment and identity perspectives of female IPA survivors, along with implicit maltreatment experiences were documented, then coded for interpretive themes. The remainder of Chapter 3 serves to present the phenomenological constructivist design. The methodological approach for the study involved administering a standardized questionnaire in concert with semistructured interview questions. The population was female IPA survivors without children at the time of the abusive relationship. Traumatic bonding served as the theoretical foundation for the exploratory and inductive methodological approach to victim study.

Research Design and Rationale

RQ1- How does a female victim perceive her bond of attachment to her abusive partner?

RQ2- How does a female victim view herself in relation to her abusive relationship?

RQ3- How does a female victim experience her partner's implicit relational abuse?

The central aim was to explore female survivor perspectives and experiences relevant to maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and implicit abuse. Lived experiences may more meaningfully be empirically understood by qualitatively interviewing abused women. Information was collected from individually conducted semi-structured interviews, including supplemental data derived from a standardized questionnaire. Interview questions were specific to survivor accounts about relational attachment, relational identity, and relational implicit abuse experiences. The study was conducted for analysis of traumatic bonding applicability based on thematic conclusions.

Qualitative research is strategically and systematically structured (Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It emphasizes significance with an identifiable issue relevant to perception, viewpoint, approach, or experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research design functions as the means for extrapolating subjectively meaningful, descriptive data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of a theoretical lens perspective necessitates specific ideas to ground or anchor the study (Creswell, 2017). Focused attention is given to inquiry direction, specific inquiry questions, and the specific ways in

which the data are collected, analyzed, and then interpreted (Creswell, 2017). The theoretical lens for this study was traumatic bonding of women who experienced maladaptive attachment, enmeshed identity, and implicit IPA. Traumatic bonding theory was used to contextualize the articulated experiences by female IPA survivors.

Ontological understanding of IPA victims is significantly biased when risk factors contributing to violence and abuse dynamics are excluded (Gagnon et al., 2017; Meyer, 2016; Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016). Partner abuse research is also epistemologically convoluted when identity constructs for victims are unacknowledged (Adjei, 2017a). Constructivism, a qualitative research design, is ontologically rooted in determining qualifying, ascribed meaning for subjective experiences (Creswell, 2017). Constructivist research is interpretive and broad in scope (Creswell, 2017). Open-ended questions with non-formulaic answers function as the means for extracting meaningful information from research participants (Creswell, 2017).

Semistructured interviews in this study were used for collecting information relevant to the primary research questions. Various strategies for questioning during an interview affords a more diverse, textured array of answers and data to disseminate, then code (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interview questions were angled, layered, and constructed so follow up questioning could be initiated for further data extraction (Saldana, 2016). Relevant study content has been qualitatively established in the literature via semistructured interviewing in reference to female victim coping skills (Crann & Barata, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016), self-identity (Adjei, 2017b; Murray et al., 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016), barriers to leave (McCleary-

Sills et al., 2017; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Umubyeyi et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017), agency to leave (Adjei, 2017a; Buchbinder & Barakat, 2016; Meyer, 2016; Velonis et al., 2017) and recovery skills (Douglas, 2018; Kern, 2017; Toews & Bermea, 2017).

Questionnaires can be used in qualitative research designs although generally relegated to quantitative research. (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Focused and efficient questionnaires are designed to be used for deft data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Responses to questionnaires can be recorded in an economical amount of time (Creswell, 2017). This method of data collection has reasonably retained validity and reliability (Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data reflected in the participant responses, including any variations, can aptly be coded and interpreted into qualifiable results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

Psychologists are held to the ethical standard of considering the influence of personal beliefs, respecting people's rights, and appreciating cultural, religious, or societal differences (APA, 2017; APA, 2013). Within the global context, cultural, religious or societal beliefs can drastically bias perception for what constitutes violence, and the legality of what signifies unlawful conduct (Candela, 2016; Grosz, 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2018; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017). The interviews of female IPA survivors required respect for each participant's cultural adherence to female subjugation, and beliefs regarding divorce or spousal abuse (Adjei, 2017a; Birdsall et al., 2017; Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Piosiadlo & Fonseca, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017). Females victimized by

violence may possess a sensitivity to culturally controversial and morally problematic issues relevant to IPA.

The research participants did not have a personal or professional relationship with the interviewer. Locations for recruitment were based on suitable criteria and not any affiliation the interviewer had with the location. Adequate information regarding study purpose, research question scope, and freedom to not participate were provided to participant candidates prior to the interview. Privacy laws were upheld, and information was not solicited from the recruitment locations. The interviewer read predetermined, preapproved scripts to avoid unintentional bias during the initial phone call with volunteers, the interview, and the interview questions.

A safe, neutral location was determined for the interviews. Each interview location provided privacy, confidentiality, and safety with closed-doors when possible, visible exits, and minimal to zero disruptions. The specific language used during the interview process to elicit participant responses at times required elaboration. The specific topic for this study necessitated careful consideration for number of questions to be asked, including follow-up questions, and the explanations provided.

Participants were reminded throughout the interview process participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any point if disclosure was too triggering or emotional. Participation could be stopped by the volunteer at any time, for any reason. Questions could be skipped by the volunteer at any time, for any reason. The participant's degree of emotional distress, and reaction to interview questions was closely monitored. The

interviewer has almost 10 years of experience as a dual-diagnosis counselor and gauged the emotional safety for each participant.

Methodology

Framed around critical theory, this qualitative inquiry assumed an advocacy stance established on tenants of promoting social empowerment through social change. Critical theory utilizes theoretical framework providing meaningful context for the identified population of interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The identified population and purposive sampling in this study were female survivors who experienced and submitted to intimate abuse. Study prospects include assistance with improving implicit maltreatment recognition, diagnosis, and IPA victim treatment.

Purposeful participant selection required an intentional setting for where the interviews were conducted, the individuals researched, the specificity of what was researched, and the process for data collection (Creswell, 2017). The purposive participants for this proposed study were female IPA survivors without children at the time of their abuse. The data collection questions centered on elements relevant to the attachment and identity enmeshment the female survivor had to her male partner. Women with children were excluded. Elements relevant to financial, parental obligation, or dependence were not examined.

Participants were recruited from specific treatment facilities in a large West Coast state. Multiple sites for recruitment were designated. Coordination was made with each facility liaison to ensure minimal disruption to participants. The researcher did not initiate interaction with potential recruits. Volunteers contacted the researcher to

participate after fliers were distributed. Questions from a script were asked by the researcher to determine whether the volunteer met the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation. All candidates who contacted the researcher qualified to be in the study. Criteria included heterosexual females aged 18 to 65 in an abusive relationship for at least one year without children with the abuser at the time.

Nationwide interviews would provide a broad range of qualitative responses for thematic coding. A much more attainable, accessible sample size of women were recruited from two counties in the same West Coast state. The sampling frame included the sufficient number of purposefully selected participants. Purposive sampling of 10 to15 participants ensured adequacy for the appropriateness of data needed to generate analytically focused sampling, and to reach saturation for thematic conclusions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Analytically focused sampling is a qualitative process to thoroughly expound the information for a more in-depth interpretation of the recurrent, emerging themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Settings for participant recruitment included outpatient facilities offering trauma counseling, dual-diagnosis treatment, legal assistance, educational classes, employment opportunities, or support groups. Residents of transitional housing were also applicable. Fliers were distributed in waiting rooms, lobbies, reception areas, or common areas for female volunteers to contact the researcher. Each flier contained 14 perforated tabs with contact information. Sample size did not exceed 10, as data saturation occurred after analyzing the minimum number of data sets.

Interviews were audio recorded for later transcription by the interviewer. An interview protocol was established for consistency, uniformity, and strategic sequencing of the methods (Creswell, 2017). Each interview began with a script introducing the participant to the process, followed by a full review of the detailed consent form, and time for any questions to be answered. Once informed consent was obtained with a signed copy for both the interviewer and participant, audio recording began. There were two parts for each interview. The PMWI in its short form was administered first, containing 14 statements. The second part of each interview was the 12 semi-structured questions answered by the participant in their own words, at their own pace.

The PMWI was developed by Richard Tolman in 1989 and is commonly used for studies relevant to IPA (Dutton & Painter, 1993a; Dutton & Painter, 1993b; Hamel et al., 2015; Neal & Edwards, 2017; Porrua-Garcia et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016). The short form (Tolman, 1999) includes 14 prompts regarding implicit abuse experiences to be rated on a scale from 1 (never experienced) to 5 (very frequently experienced). A printed scale was available for participant reference. The short form items discriminate battered women from distressed women. Half the items pertain to emotional or verbal elements, and the other half include dominance or isolation experiences. Results obtained from individual interviews were supplemented with the standardized instrument results, advantageously expanding information regarding the research questions. Interviews with a standardized questionnaire improves the data collection fidelity and structure (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The semi-structured interview questions were determined based on attachment and identity questions included in relevant qualitative studies (Adjei, 2017a; Adjei, 2017b; Buchbinder & Barakat, 2016; Crann & Barata, 2016; Douglas, 2018; Gadd & Corr, 2017; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016; Kern, 2017; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Murray et al., 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017; Ormon & Horberg, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2016; Toews & Bermea, 2017; Umubyeyi et al., 2016; Velonis et al., 2017). Experts in the field were contacted to ensure content validity. Three psychology professionals provided input regarding the interview question content and alignment with the PMWI. Qualitative IPA studies also provided a template for crafting the questions pertaining to attachment, identity, and implicit maltreatment (Crann & Barata; 2016; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016; Kern, 2017; Munoz et al., 2017; Nevala; 2017; Porrua-Garcia et al., 2016). Consultation with experts in the field, in addition to cross-checking items provided by standardized instruments for IPA studies, better ensured sufficiency of study instrument validity.

Purposive sampling selection was focused on participants contributing information-rich data regarding the phenomenology of interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There is an identified benefit of the chosen recruitment settings. Women seeking therapeutic services likely have the vocabulary or self-awareness regarding attachment styles, identity perspectives, and implicit maltreatment experiences. Multiple recruitment sites throughout Southern California also improved variants of purposive sampling participants, while widening the pool of potential recruits.

Time frames were clear, ambiguous questions were avoided, and each participant was allowed to choose her own words for embellishing answers. Interview questions were carefully selected so words, such as rape, were not used. They included the meaning of phrases such as threw me, beat me, or harassed me. Questions were expanded to include clarifying words when misunderstanding was communicated by the participant. Any necessary definitions were reviewed with participants during the interview process. Verbal threats or threatening behaviors were also included with questions pertaining to behaviors committed against the victim.

Preparation is fundamental for effective, quality interviewing. The interview resources, location of interview, recording devices, and transcription options were strategically planned and rehearsed beforehand (Ravitch & Carl., 2016). Interview questions were written and available for reference during the interview. What the interviewer gleaned during the interview process was used for data coding and interpretation. Interviewer finesse and adaptability, based on participant responsiveness, is a highly valued commodity for qualitative interviewing (Saldana, 2016).

Data were collected from a neutral location. Each interview continued for approximately 60 minutes in length. Each participant was asked to participate once. The content of the questions and study focus were clearly communicated on the recruitment flier, then over the phone. The consent form clearly demarcated interview question content and the purpose of study participation. The nature of the interview questions may have caused volunteer participants discomfort or distress and was thusly communicated.

The researcher scheduled a day, date, and time to meet approved volunteers at a local public library in close proximity to the participant's preference. Then a private study room was reserved at the designated and confirmed location. Each study room reservation allowed for a closed-door interview to occur. A sound machine was used to further protect participant responses from outside passersby. Private closed-door interviews were otherwise selected for alternative locations, or at the very least zero disruptions were ensured for the more creative settings. Participants were afforded the opportunity for a debriefing session at the conclusion of each interview. Participants also received their consent form and were reminded of receiving the study results.

This qualitative study optimized the process of coding. Codes, categories, and themes are a way to organize, manage, and present raw data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Research participant responses were the raw data. Raw data is the inception point in the process of taking specific descriptive words and translating those words into codes, then into categories, then into themes. The distillation of data and information into a readily identifiable summation is the coding objective for qualitative research (Saldana, 2016). Codes simplify ideas, thoughts, and experiences without reducing the meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). They are a way of condensing what is communicated with several sentences into one unifying word or short phrase (Saldana, 2016). The coding process involves identifying distinctive features, individual responses, and then grouping those experiences into patterns, similarities, or shared meaning (Saldana, 2016).

The distilled categories were systematically arranged groupings of the codes, and these groupings were meaningful composites (Saldana, 2016). Themes are the

summation of coding raw data and inform the ultimate theory asserted based on the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Codes, categories, and themes are distinct stages, and connect information to more broadened, universal concepts (Saldana, 2016). The most effective way of coding is to attempt multiple approaches, as some groupings will be approximations and not identical in representation (Creswell, 2017). For any discrepant cases not fitting into determined categories, grouping data from different angles has a better chance of capitalizing on the meaningful data available (Creswell, 2017). Deviant case analysis was not conducted, all coding reflected traumatic bonding.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A research design's credibility is dependent on the ability to demonstrate if the data collection methods, data results, and research conclusions are an accurate, valid representation of the identified phenomenon of study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation of multiple data collection methods, combining data obtained from interview questions and a standardized questionnaire was the strategy for improving credibility (Creswell, 2017). This qualitative study employed individual interviewing with female IPA survivors as the primary source of data collection.

An effective, quality interview is both reflexive yet objective, professional yet personable, adaptive while structured, attentive while neutral, and encouraging yet impartial (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A firm grasp of the contextual relevance and nuances allowed the interviewer to structure the questions around the study purpose (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Individual interviews required IRB approval to access and study the vulnerable purposive sample population of female IPA survivors.

The study results are not generalizable or quantifiable, rather individualized and qualifiable. Thick description is a safeguard for ensuring external validity, involving both specified behaviors and contextual information regarding the phenomenon of interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The use of semi-structured interviewing with a standardized questionnaire improved internal validity while providing data triangulation, compilation, and distortion minimization (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability is the qualitative equivalent for establishing reliability and demonstrating if the study results can be replicated by another researcher in another research study (Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A strategy to achieve dependability is to include a detailed account of what was performed during the research process. Details pertinent to validity and transferability strategies also ensure dependability, as results of a similar design from an alternate university could be replicated. The process of coding participant responses for this study is clearly indicated. The categories devised for thematic conclusions are carefully outlined.

Confirmability, verifiability, or objectivity is the ability to demonstrate if the study results can be verified by sound methodology (Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A strategy to achieve this is to include steps taken to acknowledge and minimize bias. Triangulation is also a relevant strategy to this step, as is reflexive notation of the researcher's position and biases. Three experts on trauma, addiction treatment, and victim advocacy were contacted to review the semi-structured interview questions. Utilizing experts to weigh in on the developed questions established content validity.

Ethical interviews involve the process of building rapport, establishing trust, communicating roles and responsibilities, and obtaining informed consent (Creswell, 2017). These ethical principles also integrate the practice of promoting advantageous purposes and honest interaction while minimizing potential harm (APA, 2017). Ethical principles are intended to be executed with objectivity. Ethical practice requires acknowledgement by the researcher of any biases, limitations, and awareness of or sensitivity to cultural and individual differences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Qualitative investigation is invasive by nature (Shah et al., 2016). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the structure of interview questions, and the degree of question invasiveness (Creswell, 2017). Statewide, nationwide, and international resources or services provided for victims subjected to violence influences victim cooperation and disclosure (Candela, 2016; Eckstein, 2016; Mc-Cleary-Sills et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016). The sensitive nature of the research questions indicates ethical considerations need to be made (Shah et al., 2016). Survivor research participation may cause re-traumatization, psychological distress, or harm due to purposive population vulnerability (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016).

The harm potential involved with studying this vulnerable population required detail of the invasiveness to be folded into how the informed consent was constructed, and how it was disclosed to participants (Creswell, 2017). Detailed informed consent minimizes potential participant harm (Ravitch & Carl, 2017). Participants were informed of the confidential, voluntary nature of the study. Any information disclosed during the interview process, including substance abuse or illegal activity, remained confidential.

Participants disclosing prior trauma may have been re-traumatized. Any visible discomfort during the interview was immediately addressed. The interview would have been immediately discontinued if necessary or if by participant request. In the event a participant had an adverse experience during the interview, data collection would have ended and immediate referral to the facility they were recruited from would have been made. The researcher would have terminated the interview if any indication of threat to personal safety was made due to participation. The interview would have been discontinued if an acute negative psychological reaction, such as a panic attack had occurred. At no during any of the interviews did a participant lose composure or show distress. None of the interviews needed to be interrupted by the interviewer notifying the emergency contact listed on the consent form of the participant's condition.

The interviewer made attempts to safeguard against recruiting participants actively in an abusive relationship. Actively abused victims may have been jeopardized if their abusive partner learned about their research participation. Women residing in emergency shelters were excluded from the participant pool to ensure those in crisis or with elevated physical or emotional danger risk were not compromised. The interviewer would have immediately referred the participant to contact their treatment facility if a current potential threat to personal safety had been indicated. The participant would have been referred to contact 9-1-1 if a current, imminent threat had been indicated.

The interview would have been conducted at the treatment location if a participant living in residential treatment could not leave the premises. Lack of transportation would also have altered interview locations. No interviews were conducted at recruitment

locations. No participants were observed interacting with the researcher by fellow residents or peers. The researcher exercised all discretion with each participant while in public locations and ensured all possible privacy during the interview sessions.

All research participants were afforded privacy and confidentiality. Recorded interview responses are accessible only to the interviewer. The interviewer successfully transcribed each recording, then the audio recordings were properly stored. Recorded data will be destroyed following the minimum time span of five years to ensure confidentiality. Names were not documented. Participants were given a number on their consent forms in lieu of a printed name.

Elder or child abuse were not included in the parameters of confidentiality. Exclusion of women who had children during their abusive relationship helped to minimize any child abuse disclosed. Elder or child abuse revealed during the interview process would have necessitated the interviewer notify Adult Protective Services or Child Protective Services (CPS), as applicable, after the interview. The researcher is not currently employed as a counselor and therefore is not a mandated reporter. Prior professional interaction with CPS made the interviewer aware of the detail required for follow up on a report. The likelihood of the interview questions prompting such detail from a participant, despite being minimal, was taken seriously.

Emergent information gleaned from qualitative inquiry can make protection against psychological harm challenging to anticipate or ensure against (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Victimhood is socially ascribed (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Shah et al., 2016). Victim identification can be reductive and

must be taken into consideration during the interview process, women in abusive relationships are more than victims (Grosz, 2018; Shah et al., 2016). Parameters were designated by the IRB for how and where participants could be recruited. Qualitative inquiry involves moral implications of how interviews will benefit participants (Creswell, 2017). Beneficent research specific to studying vulnerable populations must provide more than benefit to the scientific community (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Summary

The study aim was victim perspective contribution to existing data regarding traumatic bonding and IPA. Attention was directed at female survivor perspectives of attachment, identity, and the implicitly bonding experiences during intimate abuse. Implicit abuse experiences included implicit coercion, control, manipulation, isolation, intimidation, and threats. The proposed study served to generate individualized and qualifiable results, revealing thematic experiences identified by female IPA survivors.

Empirical research on DV, IPV, and IPA continues to primarily focus on heterosexual couples, male perpetration, and female victimization. Deficient consensus exists regarding qualifying parameters for what IPA demonstratively and subversively is, including less recognized constructs. These constructs include maladaptive attachment, identity enmeshment, and relational addiction found with implicit maltreatment experiences. Implicit abuse dwells sinisterly in the shadows of intimate relationship maltreatment. Research questions in this study were focused on the implicit IPA perspectives and experiences as described by female survivors.

A dearth of studies with the female victim voice legitimizes the need for qualitative research. Subjective perspectives of, and experiences for women in abusive relationships require continued exploration. Sufficient empirical research has been generated to establish IPA relevance. The traumatic bonding lens was used in the study to assist with thematic conclusions for why women yield to abuse. Illustrations may be empirically drawn for how underlying psychological components drive attachment, enmeshment, and addiction to intimate relationships comprising pervasive implicit abuse.

Emotionally compromised IPA survivors were the purposive population. The degree of participant distress was assessed by the researcher during the interview. Study purpose, research question scope, and freedom to not participate were included on the recruitment flier, initial phone call screening, and consent form. All participants were in treatment at voluntary transitional housing or outpatient locations. Emotionally unsafe or in crisis participants were carefully monitored throughout the interview process.

The interview could have been terminated, or any question could have been skipped by the participant at any time, for any reason. Questions would have been discontinued in the event a participant had an adverse experience during the interview. Immediate referral to the facility they were recruited from also would have been made. Perspectives and experiences of women who have survived abusive relationships may make it more feasible to fully comprehend attachment, identity, and implicit reasons for submitting to IPA. The results and coding process of female IPA survivor perspectives and experiences are revealed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The qualitative study design functioned as the conveyor for documenting what IPA survivors perceive and experience. Analysis was conducted to determine if a compelling emotional bond maladaptively attaches, enmeshes, and identifies victims to, or with abusers. Research questions were developed for inquiry into how a female survivor perceived her emotional connection to her abusive partner, how she viewed herself during her abusive relationship, and the specific implicit abuses she experienced during the relationship. Potential improvements to how law, law enforcement, or the health care sector views, treats, and protects abuse victims may result.

Subsequent sections of Chapter 4 include the study's parameters for selecting recruitment locations, recruiting research participants, collecting interview data, and analyzing data sets. The outpatient clinics and transitional housing sites used for research participant recruitment are described in the next section. Analytic lumping strategies and specific coding methods are carefully denoted. Data analysis was performed by generating two cycles of coding. The resulting categories include adulterated authenticity, assaultive antagonism, deliberate discernment, domineering dominance, emotion exploitation, and entrenched enmeshment. The emergent sub-themes comprise caustic, deceptive, emotional, implicit, and oppressive traumatization. Tables are included to organize the data, coding, and interpretation.

Setting

Participant recruitment considerations followed IRB guidelines and stipulations. All participants appeared forthcoming and motivated to disclose personal information during the interview. Emergency shelters were excluded from the pool of recruitment locations to safeguard participants potentially in physical or emotional risk or danger circumstances. Both physical and emotional safety could not be guaranteed if recruited women were seeking emergency assistance from actively abusive living conditions. Religiously affiliated facilities were also excluded from the recruitment locations.

None of the interviewed participants indicated currently being in an abusive relationship. All data collected pertained to participant reflection on past intimate abuse experiences and current relationship perspectives. The research setting for data collection was not consistent throughout the study. Public libraries were considered for each scheduled interview. Three interviews occurred in public libraries. Improvised settings had to be utilized for many of the interviews.

Demographics

Demographics included female survivors, aged 18-65, from heterosexual IPA relationships for a minimum of 1 year, and who did not have children during the relationship. Transportation access to a public library was also a considered factor included during the recruitment process. Exclusion criteria included male victims, victims who were mothers at the time of the abusive relationship, minors, or female survivors over 65. No minors, the elderly, or non-fluent English speakers were recruited. Subordinates, students, clients, or potential clients of the researcher were also not used as

participants. Ethnicity, education level, employment status, or religious affiliation was not addressed directly or inquired into during the recruitment and data collection.

Volunteer recruits did not exclude women residents of transitional treatment shelters, and possibly included mentally or emotionally disabled women. Female participants could also have been pregnant or economically disadvantaged during the interview. None of the participants who volunteered to be interviewed appeared to be under significant emotional distress or crisis during the interview. The specific facility each participant was recruited and receiving treatment from was not inquired into, documented, or evaluated in relation to the research content.

Data Collection

Data collection took place between April 06, 2018 and April 26, 2018. Ten data sets in total were collected. Interviews were audio recorded and were each approximately 60 minutes in length. No more than two interviews were conducted in a day, with most interviews occurring on separate days. A majority of participant responses were not written down on paper during the interview. The audio recordings were used for later verbatim transcription onto a document file. Notes were written regarding any key points, phrasings, or notable word choices expressed by the participant. There was also a noted focus on the degree of distress the volunteer presented during the interview.

Most participants reflected on the interview questions and provided answers as if the memories were far removed from any current experience. Little emotion aside from anger was communicated. Several participants became introspective and intentional while they were disclosing, some even stumbled on words. No participants appeared

distraught or tearful. No participants requested to identify an emergency contact. All participants requested the results of the study.

The plan to interview most participants in public library study rooms did not happen for seven of the ten interviews. Participants three through ten required more creative flexibility for interacting, confirming, and completing the interviews. No shows and rescheduling occurred on multiple occasions. It appeared the participant follow through had less to do with hesitation in participating and more to do with everyday life events taking precedence over a volunteer interview. Most interview locations had to be tailored to accommodate participant preference. Outsider interaction was minimized, and no disruptions occurred in all non-uniform instances. It is possible passersby overheard some interview content, no unusual or suspicious eavesdropping was observed though.

The calls for volunteering stopped after completing eight interviews. Recruitment locations were recanvassed, fliers were replenished, and the overall recruitment strategy was reassessed. Participants 9 and 10 took an extended time to secure and involved a combination of planned interview locations with slightly revised accommodations. Data collection was not extended beyond the minimum 10 research participants.

All participants demonstrated willingness to disclose personal information, none appeared distressed or overwhelmed by the interview content. Participant 9 became visibly overwhelmed by the question content and required an extended interview with time for her to organize her thoughts. She did not become dysregulated during the interview, though she did request additional time to work through her cognitive process before she responded. The participant was provided a hardcopy of the interview

questions prior to audio recording, per her voiced request. The emergency contact option on the consent form was neither requested by participants or needed during the interviews. Names used during the interviews were excluded from the data organization process. No identifying names of the abusers are referenced in the dissertation.

Data Analysis

Each interview transcription resulted in approximately two to five single-spaced, typed pages. Most transcriptions were three pages long. The transcription of each interview provided the researcher with initial category markers. All statements derived from transcription were grouped and color coded by obvious commonalities. The initial coding resulted in 15 to 20 headings for each interview. Subcategories and categories were determined and paired down once additional data sets were transcribed.

Participant responses were organized with similarity splitting and lumping. There were two primary filters, how the participant described her abuser and how she described herself. Perspectives regarding what the survivor felt or thought about herself were compiled. Experiences about what the abuser told the victim or how the abuser treated the victim during the relationship were also grouped. Groupings included sexual or body humiliation, controlling or surveilling behaviors, insecurity manipulation or vulnerability exploitation, emotional baiting, conflicting messaging, ambivalence or vacant reciprocity, entrapment or isolation, blame displacement, physical assault, aggression, or intimidation, victim behavior changes, cyclicality, and brainwashing. The groupings evolved as the data sets increased.

Coding was then executed to optimize the analysis of participant phrasing and statement content with the actual or conceptual actions communicated. Codes were then grouped and alphabetically sorted. Process codes were developed with gerund verbs describing the direct quotes from the interview data. The most common process codes were identified, then the *In Vivo* codes were examined for combining the remaining process codes into broader groups. All the essential interview data were sorted, then labeled through the two coding methods. Over 50 process codes were determined as the initial means for organizing participant responses. Six categories in total were designated based on the themes of the process codes (see Table 1).

The salient narratives in common were gradually compiled into subthemes. Thematic saturation was achieved after the eighth data set was analyzed. Interviews nine and ten contained contributing information for two categories to be deemed among the more common. Interview nine also contained information for designating a new process code, appalling sadism, though this subcategory was not a common enough one for additional thematic conclusions to be made. The most frequently indicated process codes were the aggressor baiting emotional empathy, biasing insecurities, compromising emotional well-being, demanding obedience, exploiting victim generosity, maintaining control through harassment, perpetrating perspective distortion, perpetuating relational conflict, and terrorizing the victim. The most common process code for the victim was internalizing low self-esteem.

Table 1

In Vivo and Process Coding Examples

In vivo code	Process code	Category
"Things a girl would want to hear"	Attracting the victim	Emotion exploitation
"Terrified of being alone"	Biasing insecurities	
"Convinced me"	Baiting emotional empathy	
"Threatened to leave me"	Coercing loyalty	
"Mind games"	Compromising emotional well-being	
"Had to try harder to be attractive"	Denigrating appearance	
"Never any foreplay"	Depriving intimacy	
"Didn't want to hear criticism"	Dismissing the victim	
"Possessed by the devil"	Disturbing mood shifts	
"Moved in with me, didn't pay rent"	Exploiting victim's generosity	
"Made me feel special and loved"	Idealizing the victim	
"Would criticize what, how I'd eat"	Shaming eating habits	
"Didn't possess real feelings, mimicked them"	Appalling sadism	Assaultive antagonism
"Picked me up by my throat"	Brutalizing the victim	
"Caused a huge scene"	Calculating angry tantrums	
"Would make me"	Forcing submission	
"Had all of my passwords"	Maintaining control through harassment	
"Commenting on my weight"	Objectifying the victim	
"Was extremely jealous"	Perpetuating relational conflict	
"Threatened to hurt"	Posturing intimidation	
"Broke a lot of things when mad"	Terrorizing the victim	
"Demanded my phone"	Demanding obedience/compliance	Domineering dominance
"Insisting me keep it a secret"	Dictating conditions of the relationship	
"Purposely try to get me pregnant"	Insisting on pregnancy	
"Controlled like a puppet"	Manipulating subservience	
"Made me end friendships"	Regulating social support	
"My [discomfort] turned him on"	Justifying aggression	Adulterated authenticity
"Was very kind to my family"	Performing around others	
"Blamed his cheating on my weight"	Perpetrating perspective distortion	
"Don't think he [ever] apologized"	Refusing to show contrition	
"Overtly flirtatious"	Taunting victim jealousy	
"Thought he was right"	Confusing reality	Entrenched enmeshment
"I would lie, I would protect him"	Deluding oneself	
"I said no"	Denying abuse	
"Would bite me black and blue"	Endangering sexual practices	
"Desperate to please him"	Enmeshing behavior	
"Didn't have a safe place to go"	Escalating desperation	
"Would hold my head down"	Humiliating sexual experiences	
"Bitch became my identity"	Internalizing low self-esteem	
"Thought I was able to get over it"	Minimizing the gravity of impact	
"Didn't want to deal"	Pushing away memories	
"He loved me"	Romanticizing reality	
"Friends, family didn't like him"	Shrinking social support	
"Only control I had was eating"	Struggling for autonomy	
"Couldn't be authentic"	Vanishing identity	
"Started seeing a psychologist"	Accepting professional help	Deliberate discernment
"I don't miss him"	Acknowledging growth	
"Told him never come near me again"	Choosing to leave	
"Felt my body tense"	Reacting physically	
"Wasn't capable of just stepping out"	Recognizing needs	
"Nightmares for years"	Reliving the trauma	
"Someone to talk to really helped"	Replenishing social support	

First cycle codes were applied to the subcategory development. Not all categories were acknowledged by every research participant. Deliberate discernment of the victim was not communicated by all participants. The most commonly indicated categories were an abuser's emotion exploitation, assaultive antagonism, adulterated authenticity, and domineering dominance. The most commonly described category for the victim was entrenched enmeshment (see Table 2). Numerical rankings for each participant from the PMWI were also examined during the coding process. Magnitude coding was employed for analyzing the PMWI short form answers.

Discrepant codes were not determined based on the participant responses. Some process codes were not commonly indicated by a majority of participants. These codes included disturbing mood shifts, endangering sexual practices, escalating desperation, humiliating sexual experiences, idealizing the victim, insisting on pregnancy, objectifying the victim, minimizing the gravity of abuse impact, posturing intimidation, reacting physically, and refusing to show contrition. Each of these lesser indicated codes still contributed to the sub-categories and categories.

The lesser indicated category deliberate discernment pertained to the proactive measures taken by women for successfully breaching the abuse cycle. These codes included accepting professional help, acknowledging growth, and choosing to leave. The participant responses resulting in this category were not elicited from direct inquisitions, they were ancillary data provided when answering unrelated questions. Each lesser indicated process code and lesser indicated category still fits within the boundaries of the thematic conclusions.

Table 2

Examples of Participant Statements X Category

Category	Sample statements
The abuser	
Emotion exploitation	"He blamed his cheating on me because he was not attracted to me anymore, because I had gained weight"
	"He made me feel like I wasn't good enough for him, and nothing I ever did was good enough"
	"He emotionally manipulated me into thinking I was to blame for his alcoholism and his cheating"
	"I was invisible"
Assaultive antagonism	"He would give me these looks that made me truly feel like he hated me"
	"He liked to break me, and then take care of me"
	"Caused scenes all the time when he was angry"
Domineering dominance	"He was the man of the house, he had final say so on all things"
	"I was being controlled by him like a puppet
Adulterated authenticity	"He always had to appear to be the perfect boyfriend, so it would look like I was the insane, insecure, jealous girlfriend"
	"Clever ability to manipulate, facts, information, or fantasy"
The victim	
Entrenched enmeshment	"I was so desperate to please him, and when I didn't I felt so incredibly guilty about it"
	"I always believed at the end of the argument that I was the one who should apologize"
	"It was like a magnet that I went back to him"
Deliberate discernment	"I wasn't capable of just stepping out of the relationship"
	"[I] finally realized this was not right for me"

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The psychological nature of abuse captured with the PMWI, particularly in the published short form, is limiting in regard to assessment capabilities. Triangulation of data obtained from the standardized questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questions improves the credibility of the study results. Survivor perspectives and experiences documented through actual statements does much to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data interpretation. Triangulation via compilation decreases any potential distortions from fallible memories, biased perspectives, or inconsistent retellings.

Study results are not transferable to all female victims of IPA. Women with children may provide differing responses for perceived attachment, identity, and implicit abuse experiences. Homosexual women or transgendered women may also have differing perspectives and experiences regarding IPA. The transferability and dependability of study results are limited to the study scope and purposive participant sampling. Data amassed from the standardized questionnaire and the interview questions provides a more complete aerial shot of the victim experience. The process for transcribing and dissecting each interview was consistent and methodical. Careful description of the coding process is demarcated for study replication.

Content validity was established through the interview question development stage. Three experts employed in the field of psychological assessments, clinical psychotherapy, and trauma or addiction counseling were consulted. A Licensed Clinical-Forensic Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist, and counselor with an MS in Clinical Psychology were the experts consulted for confirmability.

Results

No PMWI statement was indicated "very frequently" for every data set. The five statements "very frequently" experienced by most of the participants included *my partner called me names, my partner yelled and screamed at me, my partner told me my feelings were irrational or crazy, my partner blamed me for his problems,* and *my partner tried to make me feel crazy*. The supplemental results from the PMWI short form corroborate the interview results and improve the veracity of the data collection. The PWMI short form enhanced the analysis of interview content. Nine participants indicated the differentiating experiences of being battered, only one participant indicated being distressed.

The bulk of abuse was categorized as verbal and the battering experiences differed. Participants 3 and 5 denied experiencing any physical violence during the relationship, while Participants 1, 2, 4, and 6 through 10 detailed subjectively significant physical abuse. Participants 2, 3, and 7 indicated extreme financial and communication restrictions while in the relationship, the other participants did not indicate being controlled or manipulated this way. Participant 3 only indicated three items on the PWMI as "very frequently" experienced. Most participants indicated at least 5 of the 14 items as "very frequently" experienced. What can be deduced from the PWMI results is only what can be conferred with the interview results.

Pattern coding was employed for the second cycle data analysis. This form of meta coding allowed for a more robust categorical analysis to emerge from the data. Trauma was at the core of participant responses. The victim's attunement to trauma differed based on the actions of the abuser. Notable regularity of experience included

histrionic shifts from blank stares and being ignored to explosive rage and being verbally accosted. Blatant lying and intentional confusion orchestrated by the aggressor were commonly experienced.

The abuser's enjoyment of his partner's confusion was also a commonplace observation made by participants. Forced to participate in "mind games," as stated by Participant 5, multiple survivors reported getting laughed at, mocked, or ridiculed as the rules of being in the relationship were never explained and kept evolving. Physical violence included arms being held down, being forced to engage in unwanted sexual acts including rape or oral fellatio, bruised body parts, being picked up by the throat, backhanded in the face, threatened with a weapon, injured with a knife, or shoved.

Emotion exploitation emanated from the victimizer biasing insecurities, baiting emotional empathy, compromising emotional well-being, and exploiting victim generosity. Described by Participant 7 as, "he knew how to insult me. Whether seemingly harmless or horribly hurtful, he knew how to shift between the two extremes." The narratives of a tormentor exploiting emotion from their partner sounded eerily like barbarism. A calculated cruelty transformed the abused into a desperately enmeshed person. Entrenched enmeshment formed from the victim internalizing low self-esteem, not being "enough" or "less than" was articulated by Participants 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8.

Adulterated authenticity was exhibited by the abuser's perpetration of perspective distortion. Participant 7 noted the tendency for their partner to misrepresent relational truths while also feigning his personal persona, "he seemed adamant about chasing attention, adoration, prestige, fame." The absence of hope maintained her survival, and

misrepresenting reality also became necessary for the victim. She created and sustained a poorly constructed illusion of pretend to coincide with her partner's deceptions.

Assaultive antagonism included tormentor behaviors maintaining control through harassment, perpetuating relational conflict, and terrorizing the victim. The litany of caustic verbal lashings and combative experiences for the victim led Participant 8 to vocalize offhandedly, "it's hard to discern a selfish jerk from a sociopath." Domineering dominance was summarized with accounts of the oppressor demanding obedience and compliance. Participant 7 alluded to a nuanced approach startling her into docility, "the bait and switch occurred violently." The length of time when being baited shifted to being dominated varied, while the experience was described as a storm gathering, rumbling, then inevitably erupting. Participants 7 and 3 alluded to this storm as a mounting "tension" or "uncomfortable energy."

Several participants described all forms of trauma, some participant responses only highlighted one or two forms. Every response fell into at least one of the five sub-themes, emotional, caustic, deceptive, oppressive, or implicit traumatization. Trauma overlap was common. The two distinct themes bifurcate from traumatization into psychological or physical experiences of the victim. Women became psychologically entangled with their abuser through traumatic humiliation or they became physically entrapped by their abuser through traumatic opposition (see Table 3).

Table 3

An Overview of Categories, Subcategories, Subthemes, and Themes

Subcategories	Categories	Subthemes	Themes
Biasing insecurities Baiting emotional empathy Compromising emotional well-being Exploiting victim generosity	Emotion exploitation	Victims conditioned with devaluing, exploitative manipulation by their abuser were emotionally traumatized	Victims became psychologically entangled with their abuser through traumatic humiliation
Internalizing low self-esteem	Entrenched enmeshment	Victims helpless to continual exploitative manipulation by their abuser were implicitly traumatized	
Perpetrating perspective distortion	Adulterated authenticity	Victims subjected to cognitively distorting manipulation by their abuser were deceptively traumatized	
Maintaining control through harassment Perpetuating relational conflict Terrorizing the victim	Assaultive antagonism	Victims subjugated to physically restrictive, harassing control by their abuser were caustically traumatized	Victims became physically entrapped by their abuser through traumatic opposition
Demanding obedience/compliance	Domineering dominance	Victims forced into relationally restrictive, manipulating control by their abuser were oppressively traumatized	

Summary

Participants in this study were capable, well-spoken women who could reflect on their abuse without succumbing to the emotional weight of the experiences. None of the women indicated irreversible damage. Some mentioned current peaceful, healthy relationships or marriages in comparison. Some women noted the ongoing effort required to overcome self-blame and self-loathing. A few of the women expressed pity for their abusers. Anger was commonly referenced in name throughout the interviews, although largely absent from the emotive responses. All women indicating physical abuse corroborated research indicating violent behaviors directed at IPA recipients range from beating and choking to arm twisting and hair pulling to grabbing, pushing, slamming, or slapping (Sherrill et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2016).

Commonalities emerged and were steadily grouped as interview transcription occurred. The tenets of traumatic bonding were not refuted by research participant responses. Victim attachment to her abusive partner was consistently representative of a maladaptive bond. Power incongruences, experienced by assaultive antagonism and domineering dominance, along with intermittent physical violence experiences created the bond of entrenched enmeshment. Physical maltreatment experiences were offset with counteractive measures perpetrated by the abuser through implicit coercion, control, manipulation, or aggression. These measures included emotion exploitation and adulterated authenticity.

The bond of attachment was a coerced loyalty achieved through forced submission, manipulated subservience, obedience, and compliance. The abuser's

perspective distortions created a confusion for the victim, wherein denial deluded her reality and her capacity for empathy. The victim romanticized or sentimentalized moments of her relationship, enmeshing her to the abuser. Participants described the bond as an uncomfortable, temperamental alliance, where the stretches of pleasant moments were shortened over time and replaced with chaotic, unpleasant dynamics.

Self-views during the abusive relationship were exclusively negative. The views expressed by the participants exposed a degraded self-worth specific to her lowered self-esteem, diminished identity, and reduced autonomy. Mounting insecurities, compromised emotional well-being, and an escalating desperation contributed to the consistently poor self-views. Disgust, defeat, helplessness, and powerlessness were specific words spoken by survivor participants 7 through 10.

Implicit abuse was described by each research participant as an extensive experience of oppression, control, and manipulation architected by the abuser. Appearance denigration or shaming, objectification, sexualized humiliation, and flaunted flirtations were a major component of the survivor's experiences. Implicit abuse was also referenced as overt harassment perpetuating relational conflict, terrorizing the victim, and at times endangering the victim. Dictating the conditions of the relationship, insisting on pregnancy, and regulating the victim's social support were continual ways in which the participants were implicitly abused. The thematic interpretation of the results will be reviewed in Chapter 5. Traumatic bonding applicability will also be assessed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Intimate abuse is a complex worldwide social crisis (Blake et al., 2018; Kavak et al., 2018; McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Pill et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Violence perpetrated against women is globally most commonly intimately committed (McCleary-Sills et al., 2016; Neal & Edwards, 2017). A phenomenological constructivist inquiry was intended to collect data on female IPA survivor perspectives and experiences. Exploration of lived experiences may add to what is currently known regarding women remaining in abusive relationships, despite the danger risk. The responses from female survivors were qualitatively examined, using traumatic bonding theory as a lens. In-person interviews were used to document perspectives of, and experiences for women previously attached to, identifying with, and enmeshed in abusive relationships.

All participant data obtained from the study confirmed existing research. Relational aggression and emotional battering are more commonly experienced than physical violence (Candela, 2016; Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). Imminent threat to safety or actual harm risk does little to accelerate victim resolve for relational dissolution, even with physical violence (Curtis et al., 2017). The survivor is sustained through protracted and tormenting moments in the relationship by sentimentalizing the brief moments. Victim denials, minimizations, and justifications are further rooted when romanticizing the abuser (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Grosz, 2018; Kern, 2017). Romanticism also conflates the victim's confusion and skews the predator's hypocrisies (Grosz, 2018).

Interpretation of the Findings

The consistent findings in the research regarding traumatic bonding were analyzed alongside the data collected. Perceived attachment, self-esteem, and trauma are interrelated within traumatic bonding theory (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). These variables have strong predictive ability for women remaining in or returning to abusive relationships (Godbout et al., 2017; Messing et al., 2017; Torres et al., 2016). Intermittency, power shifts, and delayed attachment are additional variables with direct, potent influence on women enduring abuse (Birdsall et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Tani et al., 2016). The experience of time does not weaken dependent variable strength, nor does it weaken victim bond strength to the abuser (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016). There is a definitive grip and graft that occurs during the traumatic bonding process.

Maladaptive attachment, enmeshed identity, and implicitly bonding abuse are hallmark features of the traumatic bonding phenomenon. A key bonding component is the sustaining grip, then graft due to unpredictable intermittency of abuse frequency and maltreatment severity (Birdsall et al., 2017; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Park, 2016; Shah et al., 2016; Tani et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016). The research participants reflected on past abusive experiences. What she experienced and how she changed over time were relevant distinctions.

Traumatic bonding features of psychological distress (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Murray et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2016), emotional dysregulation (Gagnon et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016), insecure attachment (Godbout et al., 2017;

Tougas et al., 2016; Wright, 2017), and elevated internal arousal (Mills et al., 2018; Pill et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2016) were thematically indicated in the responses. Thematic analysis was used to determine a two-pronged experience for IPA female victims, traumatic humiliation and traumatic opposition. The former involves recurrent emotional, implicit, and deceptive traumatization. The latter encompasses recurrent caustic and oppressive traumatization.

Traumatic Humiliation

Abuse intermittency affords victims an incongruous attachment for emotionally bonding with the victimizer (Birdsall et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Tani et al., 2016). Normalization, guilt, and commitment have all been found to contribute to a victim distorting, minimizing, or ignoring the abusive experiences (Crann & Barata, 2016; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017). Distortions, minimizations, and denials perpetuate victimization tolerance (Adjei, 2017a; Grana et al., 2016; Rajan, 2018; Tani et al., 2016). Abusive relationship longevity correlates to degradation experiences diminishing victim self-worth, strength, and confidence (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Participant 8 sensed being depersonalized by her partner, "I felt like I was just an object, not a person to him. He barely touched me, my pleasure was definitely not important. I felt disgusting."

Gradual dehumanization corresponds with the subtheme victims conditioned with devaluing, exploitative manipulation by their abuser, were emotionally traumatized. Women develop a bonding attachment to the abuser as the emotional and psychological weight of a damaged self-image merges with the strength of the tormentor's treatment (Gagnon et al., 2017; Park, 2016). Enmeshment occurs as physical abuse is counteracted

with less obvious forms of maltreatment and manipulation (Adjei, 2017a; Park, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). The need to align cognitive dissonance with her reality, regardless of how extensive the abuse, became the motivation for enduring the abuse.

Participants illustrated an exhausting dual existence of fanciful pretending in conflict with abject misery. Fragmented moments of subjective happiness were encouraged by a sickening denial of reality. Burgeoning periods of actual despair were mollified by brief sparks of illusion. She allowed herself to remain in the collapsed, yet twisted and painful farce. There was not an expressed intentionality of victimhood though. Participant 8 conveyed psychological distress and emotional dysregulation through the vehicle of helplessness, "I knew everything happening around me, but I was stuck and couldn't move, like I was watching myself destroy myself."

Stigmatized victimhood proliferates a learned helplessness for the victimized (Adjei, 2017a; Grosz, 2018; Murray et al., 2018; Tani et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2016). The precarious act of balancing intuitive protective mechanisms against unrealistic projective delusions was described as a relentless cascade of lies colliding with denials. The abuser's lies permeated, desecrated, and obliterated any ability for the target to think rationally, objectively, or defensively. Significantly high relational distress correlates to significantly low relational control, which is consistent with research on earthquake, war, and torture survivors (Salcioglu et al., 2017). Victim anticipatory fear, formed from experienced trauma, reinforces recurrent traumatization (Salcioglu et al., 2017).

The inability to control the maltreatment became the source of self-blame for Participant 7, "what I was [allowing to be done to me] somehow became less forgivable

than what he was doing to me." The unyielding self-blame entombed Participant 8 in cyclical criticism and blatant cynicism, "I could have saved myself a lot of grief. The toughest person to forgive is myself." The pervasive experiences of duplicity by the significant other illustrate the sub-theme women helpless to continual exploitative manipulation by their abuser, were implicitly traumatized.

Subjective descriptions from IPA victims identify pervasive experiences involve intimidation, isolation, and control (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Oka et al., 2016). There are creative, varied ways an abuser capitalizes on the intent to control, manipulate, exploit, or deceive. Circular logic was a familiar tactic, illustrated by Participant 7, "he loved using endless conflicting analogies and metaphors that stalled my ability to effectively argue." The emotional and psychological modes of control, manipulation, exploitation, and deception were specifically identified by research participants, corroborating current research (Candela, 206; Gagnon et al., 2017; Grosz, 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Nevala, 2017; Pill et al., 2017). The more intent Participant 3 was to achieve resolve, the deeper her partner steeped her in confusion, "I kept wanting to talk about his offensive behaviors. He wanted to continually argue about word choice or my need to always rehash the past." The intentional ploys of gaslighting connects to the sub-theme women subjected to cognitively distorting manipulation by their abuser, were deceptively traumatized.

Stigmatized identity entrenches victim resolve to remain silent and voiceless (Adjei, 2017a; Eckstein, 2016; Grosz, 2018; Murray et al., 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016). The victim's sense of invisibility began in the tormentor's presence and intensified by his

indifference. The victim was edged further away from confidence, self-esteem, and self-assurance as she hid in self-pity. IPA survivors communicated survival in degrees within the confines of a pretend existence. Each choice to stay and live in misery were the very reasons she could not condemn his barbarianism. The shame of being ruined and destroyed was horrifyingly magnified by the enervating experience of being humiliated.

Traumatic Opposition

Physical violence is not the predominant abusive relationship feature (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016). Relational aggression does not necessarily reflect physical manifestations of abuse (Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). It is both assaultive and coercive. The abuser's mainstay of abuse is through dominance, intimidation, and control incapacitating the victim into submission (Gadd & Corr, 2017; Oka et al., 2016). The traumatic bonding features of psychological distress and emotional dysregulation during the abuse were expressed by research participants. Distress and dysregulation were particularly described when Participant 7 avowed feeling "utter powerlessness" in the relationship. Powerlessness coincides with the sub-theme victims being forced into relationally restrictive, manipulating control by their abuser, were oppressively traumatized.

The paradoxical experiences evident within traumatic bonding (Adjei, 2017b; Chester & DeWall, 2018; Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Torres et al., 2016) were categorically expressed by research participants. Contradictory occurrences indicated by Participant 10 exposed the abuser's dichotomy, "he hated the cops but didn't seem opposed to having the cops called on him." Hypocrisy was also communicated by

Participant 10, “he had no problem yelling out his car window at a dad who may have jerked his kid’s arm a little too hard yet couldn’t find fault in having smacked me in the face not five minutes before.” Participant 9 clearly articulated a disconnect with how her intimate partner treated her, “didn’t matter that I was a sobbing puddle on the floor because of him, just mattered that he wiped me up off the floor.”

Mechanisms and mediating factors linking insecure attachment to relational aggression, particularly those specific to relationship power, have been researched (Godbout et al., 2017; Notestine et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016). Male relational power is significantly positively correlated to female relational victimization (Oka et al., 2016). Attachment and power perceptions hold predictive validity for determining relational aggression. Those engaging in relational aggression also perceive themselves as having less relational power than the victim partner, perpetuating the hostility (Oka et al., 2016). Perpetuation of insecure attachment elevated Participant 9’s internal arousal, “periods of quiet and calm left me restless, anticipating when the chaos was going to charge me.”

Insecure attachment is statistically indicated with relational aggression, and directly influenced by partner aggression (Oka et al., 2016; Tougas et al., 2016). Insecure attachment was articulated with Participant 8’s referencing the predator’s fickle connection to her, “the chemistry was intense, but the emotional connection was just off.” The abuser’s sexual desire was not in harmony with physical intimacy, instead it reflected the appetite of a man greedily craving sexual intensity and continual satisfaction. Awareness of the abuser’s emotional disconnect only contributed to Participant 7’s tenable confidence, “I knew he was cheating on me, at times with multiple women, yet I

became convinced I wasn't trying hard enough to keep him from straying. If I could just be sexier, or more adventurous, or more attentive." Self-doubt was also heightened for Participant 8, "Why was I so in love with such an evil man?"

Both partner and relationship dissatisfaction more greatly influence lowered self-esteem, as opposed to the impact of violence experience alone (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Research participants clearly articulated being coercively controlled into insecurity, the sub-theme women subjugated to physically restrictive, harassing control by their abuser, were caustically traumatized. Coercive control manifests on a gradient spectrum rather than a binary pole (Candela, 2016). Coercive control more strongly correlates to psychological, physical, or sexual violence, traumatization, and higher risk of recurrent victimization (Dichter, Thomas, Crits-Cristoph, Ogden, & Rhodes, 2018). Domination, captivity, and recurring intermittent abuse contribute to gradual deconstruction of female self-esteem (Candela, 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2016).

Traumatic Humiliation and Opposition

The confluence of traumatic humiliation and opposition was reflected in participant responses specific to relational infidelity. The treatment she was subjected to during the relationship directed the internalization of what she felt about herself. Emotional exploitation lured Participant 7 into neediness, "it's a [messed] up way to keep someone hooked, reduce [my] self-esteem to such a state that [him] coming back to [me] is the only sign of validation [I'm] worth something." The perceived and actualized stigma of her victimhood becomes inextricably entangled with her identity (Douglas,

2018; Grosz, 2018; Kern, 2017; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Meyer, 2016; Murray et al., 2018). Participants 1, 2, 4, and 6 expressed a lack of victim identification, beyond expectation conditioning (Grosz, 2018; Murray et al., 2018; Nevala, 2017; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018), as if abuse validation were not sought nor given during the IPA. In concert with the tangible accounts of identity fracturing and self-derision, Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7 through 10 in this study resoundingly acknowledged the tragic experiences of relational betrayal.

Infidelity, although not extensively acknowledged within IPA literature, was a commonplace reality for most of the research participants. Overt unfaithfulness was discussed by a majority of participants, seven of the 10 women. The remaining three alluded to suspicions of their partner's disloyalty. Participant 7 stressed the intentional cruelty of her partner, "I think it was [pleasurable for him] knowing I would periodically find out he was pursuing more than me. As if [I] needed to be reminded how desirable he was to other women, and how replaceable I was." *In Vivo* codes provided visual examples of consistent victim language regarding being cheated on and resulted in the process codes performing around others and taunting victim jealousy. Victim blaming, accusation projecting, and emotional baiting are effective strategies to mire the victim in self-loathing and helplessness (Chester & DeWall, 2018).

Participant 7 acknowledged the contradiction of her situation, "I became so disgusted with myself that I kept wanting intimate connection from someone who was sleeping with other women. I don't know that I will ever fully get over what that did to me." Participants 2, 5, 7 and 9 described the relational ramifications from harboring the

weight of their partner's deceptions. Participant 7 conveyed "my trust issues became a major reason for fights, I was being buried in a hole I could not escape from. And the person packing on the dirt was staring me in my face and lying."

Participant 5's inability to face her own reflection, literally and figuratively, was elevated by suffering betrayal, "I was competing with invisible women, which was ironic, because I was invisible to them too. They didn't even know I existed. I wasn't the faithful girlfriend, I was the crazy roommate." The visual sight of her sorrowful pain only entrenched upending helplessness and self-disgust for Participant 9, "my insecurities, jealousies, suspicions were confirmation he could keep offending me with the same trust breaking behaviors and I would keep taking it."

Thematic Conclusions

Exclusive emotional dependence, attachment anxiety, restricted autonomy, and proactive aggression are evident in abusive relationships (Godbout et al., 2017; Park, 2016). Undeniable traumatic stress in IPA correlates to identifiable PTSD symptomology amongst victims (Pill et al., 2017; Salcioglu et al., 2017). Continual threat to safety along with continual sense of helplessness is the strongest PTSD symptom predictor (Salcioglu et al., 2017). Minimizing danger risk requires victims to conform to the abuser's demands (Curtis et al., 2017; Dichter et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2018; Velonis et al., 2017). Negative relationship schemas, abuse acceptance, normalization of abuse, and personal identity erosion are characteristic descriptions of IPA victim experience (Gagnon et al., 2017; Megias et al., 2018; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Rajan, 2018). They were also mutually experienced realities for the abuse survivors.

Two potent and interrelated process codes were indicated by two prominent experiences for abuse victims. Biasing insecurities is an intentional tactic by the abuser to maintain superiority. The constant barrage of unfavorable communication and treatment battered the women and biased insecurities through an internalized low self-esteem over time. Battering is perpetrated to assert control and sustain power over the abused partner (Notestine et al., 2017, p. 57). Specific variables of coercive control, within traumatic bonds, are rooted in power differentials and intermittent violence, maltreatment, and abuse experiences (Birdsall et al., 2017; Oka et al., 2016).

All five subthemes funnel into two divergent thematic components. Women from this study communicated perspectives and experiences specific to psychological humiliation or physical opposition. Humiliation is the culmination of emotional, deceptive, and implicit trauma psychologically entangling the victim with her victimizer. Opposition is the convergence of caustic and oppressive trauma physically entrapping the target with her tormentor. Manipulation and control were distinct vehicles of maltreatment for the abuser leading to the victim's experienced traumatization.

Limitations of the Study

The study results are not generalizable or quantifiable. The way in which recruitment took place may have limited a more diverse array of volunteer participation. Eliciting phone call volunteering is an almost outdated mode of recruitment. It appeared most participants were more comfortable texting confirmation of the interview date and time. Several no shows and reschedules further indicate over the phone and face to face interactions are less preferred methods of communication. It is possible a less forward

way of recruiting and a less intrusive way of collecting data may have resulted in more participation or more data sets.

Confidential, safe, convenient locations for the interviews to be conducted at forced the need for less uniformity and more creativity of data collection. The intended and expected methodological approach for data collection did not come to fruition. It is not possible to ascertain if the unconventional means and locations of interviewing effected the content of data collected. It is necessary to indicate the limitations inherent in the impromptu settings and locations that were secured.

Occupational status was not included during the interview process. It was apparent though that many of the participants were employed, productive members of society. All except for one participant had reliable transportation. The sample population may or may not represent the larger IPA victim population. The female participants largely echoed a subtle acceptance of victim stigma within their respective communities. Friend and family systems were not mentioned when steps taken to leave the abuse were vocalized.

Recommendations

Multiple secondary questions became apparent when analyzing the data derived from this study. Recommendations for further study are grounded in the scope limitations. Why and how the survivor successfully separated from the abuser was not inquired nor examined. Documentation and analysis of how a victim becomes a survivor is a vital component to understanding traumatic bonding. Future research on this

dissertation topic would be enriched with qualitative insight into an abuse target's successful disentanglement.

Abuse frequency and its correspondence with a victim's negative partner perception was not analyzed. Prolonged abuse exposure may result in a female victim harboring lower partner opinion. Presence of psychological abuse positively correlates to poor partner evaluation (Curtis et al., 2017; Godbout et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Tougas et al., 2016). It is unclear nor was it examined in this study if the extent and duration of psychological abuse results in decreased partner evaluation.

The effects of abuser idealization could also be more completely researched. Victim experiences of being battered may be mediated with abuser idealization, contributing to battering minimization (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017; Grana et al., 2016; Grosz, 2018; Shah et al., 2016). Abuser idealization may alter victim perceptions regarding self-esteem. It is unclear nor was it examined if decreased partner evaluation or diminished abuser idealization in turn affects victim self-esteem.

The consistent disclosure of infidelity also prompted an unexpected interpretation regarding IPA victim perspectives and experiences. All 10 research participants expressed the experience of overt, blatant betrayal or at the very least credible, plausible suspicion. Negative partner perception, abuser idealization, and partner infidelity are all relevant recommendations for further research into traumatic bonding and how a victim becomes a survivor.

Implications

Qualitative research can further intellectual and psychological discourse regarding maladaptive attachment (Park, 2016; Shah et al., 2016), identity enmeshment (Crann & Barata, 2016; Grosz, 2018; O'Doherty et al., 2016; Munoz et al, 2017; Murray et al., 2018), and implicit abuse experiences (Ali et al., 2016; Candela, 2016; Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Research focusing on implicit abuse aspects could potentially contribute to improved clinical diagnosing, intervention, and treatment (Dichter et al., 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Murray et al., 2018). Continued research on implicit forms of IPA may influence legislative DV statutes (Reicher, 2017; Schuler & Nazneen, 2018; Walby & Towers, 2018; Zakaliyat & Susuman, 2018). Research may also shift law enforcement protocols for approaching, assessing, and intervening in DV situations (Birdsall et al., 2017; Douglas, 2018; Johnson & Dai, 2016; Myhill & Johnson, 2016; O'Neal & Spohn, 2017).

Victim research focuses on the qualitative aspects of the abuse target's perspectives and experiences. The interpretations of the research findings thusly also focus on the qualitative information expressed by the survivor participants. This qualitative orientation does not account for abuser perspectives or experiences. A male perpetrator's experience of anger mediates the relationship between excessive emotional, relational dependency and behavioral aggression (Wright, 2017). Self-perceived relationship quality influences if cognitive reappraisal works to inhibit an abuser's negative urgency to engage in aggression (Blake et al., 2018). Male perpetrator empathy negatively correlates to violence perpetration (Ulloa & Hammett, 2016). It is possible

perpetrator research is needed to definitively encapsulate how a victim can successfully become a survivor.

Conclusions

Inner IPA workings are delicate and personal (Candela, 2016). Intimate abuse moments comprise experiences involving coercive control, subtle manipulation, credible intimidation, and gradual isolation (Ali et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017). Privacy, self-respect, autonomy, and equality are all controlled and manipulated by tormentors (Candela, 2016). Aggressor coercive methods inflict debilitating and irreparable consequences for victims emotionally attached and enmeshed with them (Ali et al., 2016; Nevala, 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Traumatic bonding theory is the result of insufficient data to define, conceptualize, and measure subjectively recognized coercive control elements and experiences amongst abusive intimate relationships (Park, 2016; Shah et al., 2016). The bond of attachment from victim to abuser remains strong despite the broad abuses experienced (Godbout et al., 2017).

Victim self-views during the abusive relationship and post relationship are predominantly comprised of a metamorphosis into conditioned degradation. Participants echoed the experiences of being programmed to internalize negativity, criticism, and insults. The stigmatizing pull of arbitrary vitriol was not only reinforced by the tormentor's pathologic hostility, it was also embedded into the victim's own sense of self-contempt. The predator slowly and systematically destroyed any vestige of self, creating an incapacitating paralysis for the abuse target. Any avoidance tactics made by

the victim only postponed later elevated internal distress, cycling the victimization experience (Mills et al., 2018).

The implicit abuses experienced during the IPA positioned the women as prey in their own relationship. Women participants described their intimate partners as the cunning, predatory villain of their own story. Diabolic, vicious betrayals were regular occurrences. The lingering effects of the abuse were articulated by multiple women post separation. The emotional effect was indicated as tragically visceral, heinously palpable, and unnervingly addicting. Successful separation required a grieving process that in turn empowered the victim to push through and survive grief with resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptability. The challenges faced by women desperate to leave abusive relationships are fortified when encountering impenetrable power imbalance, sexism, and social stigma. Antiquated legislation prevents equitable interactions, treatment, and solution-based interventions for abused women.

Helplessness is not found to directly result in PTSD, as not all trauma survivors develop PTSD (Salcioglu et al., 2017). Trauma symptomology is also not only relegated to current IPA victims (Pill et al., 2017). Women experiencing abuse by ex-partners, or survivors no longer experiencing harm can still exhibit traumatization (Pill et al., 2017). Physical entrapment through opposition may end when the relationship ends.

Psychological entanglement through humiliation does not necessarily end when a woman successfully separates from her abusive partner. The grip and graft of traumatic bonding is fiercely powerful. Continued victim research regarding IPA may help loosen the clutch abusers have on their targets.

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Appendix A: Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory Short Version

This questionnaire is based on items discriminating battered women from women in distressed relationships. It asks about actions you may have experienced in your relationship with your partner. Answer each item as carefully as you can by indicating a number for each statement:

1=NEVER
2=RARELY
3=OCCASIONALLY
4=FREQUENTLY
5=VERY FREQUENTLY
NA=NOT APPLICABLE

Throughout the relationship:

10. My partner called me names.

11. My partner swore at me.

12. My partner yelled and screamed at me.

13. My partner treated me like an inferior.

26. My partner monitored my time and made me account for my whereabouts.

30. My partner used our money or made important financial decisions without talking to me.

32. My partner was jealous or suspicious of my friends.

36. My partner accused me of having an affair with another man.

39. My partner interfered in my relationships with other family members.

40. My partner tried to keep me from doing things to help myself.

42. My partner restricted my use of the telephone.

45. My partner told me my feelings were irrational or crazy.

46. My partner blamed me for his problems.

49. My partner tried to make me feel crazy.

Note. From "The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory," by R. Tolman, 1999, *Violence and Victims*, *14*(1), p. 37. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix B: Attachment, Identity, and Implicit Abuse Experiences

1-Can you speak about moments where you felt you weren't an equal in the relationship? If he demanded obedience, decided how you should dress, what you should eat, or if you should smoke or drink, if he belittled, humiliated, mocked, or invalidated you, if you felt like his servant, catering to when and how he wanted things done?

2-Can you describe any instances of your partner's intrusiveness? If he listened in on phone conversations, read your e-mails, went through your phone or belongings without your permission, followed you or had you followed, hung around outside your house, or harassed you at work, threatened to damage or actually damaged your phone, unlocked your phone to search through texts, pictures, emails, social media, or contacts, or intentionally locked your phone so you could not use it?

3-Can you recount any financial strain, uneasiness, or anxiety you experienced during the relationship? If he made major decisions affecting you without consulting with you, prevented you from making decisions about family finances or shopping independently, convinced you to pay for things you could not afford, or if he hid important information from you?

4-Can you recall how your partner impacted your relationship with friends or family? If he acted rude toward, gossiped about, or told lies about your family or friends, tried to restrict your contact with family or friends, tried to convince friends or family you were crazy, or threatened to reveal or actually revealed an embarrassing secret about you to friends or family?

5-Can you speak about moments of jealousy, suspicion, or accusations directed at you from your partner? If he acted very upset or got angry if you spoke to another man, insisted you couldn't live without him, threatened to break up with you, end the relationship, or hurt himself, became suspicious you were unfaithful, insisted on sex with him in belittling and humiliating ways, refused to have sex with you, refused to speak to you or withheld physical or verbal affection?

6-Can you recount times when your partner caused you to feel confused or conflicted about what he said or did? If he showered you with compliments only to criticize you moments later, made claims about how special and important you were only to then ignore important holidays and events, showed you a tender, romantic side preceding or following brutal name calling or volatile behavior, did not tolerate you disagreeing with him, rejected your way of thinking when it didn't coincide with his or when you pointed out his contradictions, and imposed his view of things?

7-Can you describe ways in which your partner blamed you for relational problems? If he blamed you for causing their violent behavior, treated you with scorn, strong hatred, or

contempt, showed appreciation or affection only when it was in his own interest, or became enraged with your emotional reaction to his behavior, or blamed you for almost everything going wrong nor not working between you two?

8-Can you recall your partner claiming your feelings were irrational or crazy? If he intentionally turned a neutral interaction into an argument or disagreement, directly told you that you were crazy, pointed out others as attractive or flirted in front of you then accused you of inappropriate behavior when you reacted to his behavior, denied he was having an affair or accused you as the reason he was cheating, denied saying or doing something to upset you even though he did, or treated an argument as though he had to "drive you into the ground" when making their points?

9-Can you speak about your partner's verbal aggressiveness? If he insulted, ridiculed, or mocked you in private or in front of others, criticized, belittled, called you a derogatory name, criticized your physical looks or sexual performance, told you that you weren't good enough and no one would ever want you?

10-Can you describe your partner's physical aggressiveness? If he caused you physical injury, used a weapon as intimidation, threw objects that caused property damage, caused you to be fearful of him, forced you to have sex, or made you perform sexual acts you did not enjoy or like?

11-Can you recount your partner's emotional aggressiveness? If he yelled and screamed, threw a temper tantrum by breaking objects or acting in a rage, verbally threatened to physically harm you or made a gesture to frighten you, damaged your personal things of value (pictures, keepsakes, clothes)?

12-Can you recall your partner's rigid control of you? If he threatened to hurt you or a loved one, kept you from medical care, kept you from doing activities you enjoy, demonstrations of love occurred when seeking forgiveness for offensive behavior or infidelity, made you do things that went against your values without considering what you wanted?