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Witnessed Intimate Partner Abuse and Later Perpetration: The Maternal Attachment Influence

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Abstract

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MA, Tiffin University, 2014

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Witnessing intimate partner abuse (IPA) as a child is linked to later perpetration as an adult. Questions remain regarding why some men who witnessed abuse go on to perpetrate, while others do not. The influence maternal attachment has on IPA perpetration after witnessed IPA has not been thoroughly researched. Maternal attachment is a complex variable grounded in attachment theory and may explain why some men fail to relate to their victimized mothers. The purpose of this study was to assess the influence maternal attachment has on men who witnessed IPA as a child and later perpetrated IPA as an adult. An interpretative phenomenological approach was used to explore this. Eight participants responded to semistructured interview questions designed to explore their lived experiences regarding maternal attachment. While the majority of participants stated they felt a strong connection to their mother despite witnessing IPA as a child, further statements by participants seemed to coincide with anxious or avoidant forms of attachment. Study results shed light on the influence maternal attachment has on IPA perpetration and the societal implications regarding necessary counseling and support for young men who witnessed IPA. Societal acknowledgement of young male victimization regardless of subjection to physical abuse themselves would set the foundation for further funding, resources, and research regarding witnessed IPA, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration that may prevent future incidents and end abusive cycles leading to positive social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedication to those who encouraged the challenge, supported the effort, and will benefit from the outcome.

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I would like to acknowledge those who have helped me in this process. Thank you, Dr. Xuereb, for your timely responses and the simplicity of your expectations. It is a rare feat to find a chair that both supports and challenges you every step of the way - I am lucky to have found that in you. Thank you also to Dr. Jessica Hart, who has provided clear feedback helping me grow in my thought process and development. Both you and Dr. Xuereb contribute so much to your students. I would also like to thank my family for their continued support and understanding through this time-consuming process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is a prevalent societal issue that does not discriminate factors such as race, class, and education (Boeckel et al., 2017; Chester & DeWall, 2018; Ruddle et al., 2017). Victims suffer emotional dysregulation, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Boeckel et al., 2017; Ragavan et al., 2017). Children who witness IPA experience similar symptoms, including psychosocial, educational, and interpersonal difficulties throughout their lives (Callaghan et al., 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Horn et al., 2017). Children present during partner violence are rarely acknowledged as victims (Cohodes et al., 2016; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Xie & Lynch, 2017).

Male children exposed to IPA are more likely to continue abusive cycles through adult perpetration (Foshee et al., 2016; Hou, Yu, Fang, & Epstein, 2016; Semiatin et al., 2017). The connection between witnessed IPA and perpetration has been previously researched (Fowler et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017). Attachment research has focused on moderator variables unrelated to witnessed abuse (Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017; Park, 2016; Stefan & Avram, 2018). Direct research involving the child-mother relationship is limited (Cort & Cline, 2017; Jones & Vetere, 2017; Suh et al., 2016), especially for young men. Maternal attachment effects on witnessed abuse may further explore why some young men exposed to IPA go on to perpetrate while others do not (Boeckel et al., 2017; Sogar, 2017; You & Kim, 2016), thus reducing future abusive

incidents. My focus for this study was male child presence during IPA, the male-perpetrated abuse cycle, and the lesser-known combined maternal attachment influence.

Background

Over 15 million children in the United States witness interparental abuse each year (Etherington & Baker, 2018; Kiesel et al., 2016; Sargent et al., 2016). More than four million American youth will witness this abuse before the age of 5 years old, making them even more likely to suffer adverse effects (Narayan et al., 2017). Roughly 30% of women are subjected to IPA, with 60% stating children were home during the incident (Rosmalen-Nooijens et al., 2017). For offenders deemed to be violent across spectrums, recidivism escalates for those who have witnessed and been victims of abuse (Fowler et al., 2016).

Several variables may influence the link between witnessed IPA and later perpetration. A child's age when IPA is witnessed is one such variable (Narayan et al., 2017). Male children who witness severe abuse between parents while toddlers or preschool age, as opposed to infancy, are more likely to become IPA perpetrators by the age of 23 years (Narayan et al., 2017). Even for children who do not offend by 23 years, IPA exposure during this age range is linked to increasing levels of IPA perpetration through adulthood (Narayan et al., 2017). By age one, children are shown to have effects from witnessed abuse (Ruddle et al., 2017). An estimated 34 to 54% of male children exposed to domestic abuse will become offenders (Burnette et al., 2017; Ruddle et al., 2017). IPA perpetration after witnessed abuse may stem from poor attachment or acceptance of learned behaviors (Ruddle et al., 2017).

Insecure attachment has been linked to IPA offenders. Anxious attachment after witnessed abuse is linked to increased violence in relationships and IPA victimization in a female sample (Smith & Stover, 2016). In studies where male samples were used, anxious attachment is notably connected to abuse perpetration (McDermott et al., 2017). Avoidant attachment is rarely linked to IPA perpetration among men, except for instances when dominance-intimidation measures were high (McDermott et al., 2017). This may be due to males using relationship avoidance as protection from violent episodes (McDermott et al., 2017).

While information specifically related to maternal attachment and later IPA perpetration may be scarce, connections between witnessing IPA and insecure maternal attachment can be made. Societal pressures insist mothers maintain appropriate parenting skills amidst abuse (Cort & Cline, 2017). Blame is often placed on a mother by the abuser and society, often resulting in the need for maternal counseling to maintain healthy attachment to their child (Cort & Cline, 2017). Counseling may improve hindered physical and emotional availability, which ultimately strain a child's emotional regulation (Boeckel et al., 2017). As IPA exposure increases, PTSD symptoms in a child increase and maternal attachment decreases (Boeckel et al., 2017). Children are less likely to recognize the influence IPA has on maternal availability as such abuse is frequently minimized by both parents (Boeckel et al., 2017).

Children in homes where IPA is present may also make attempts to avoid the experience (Louis & Johnson, 2017). This avoidance may translate to future intimate partner relationships (Louis & Johnson, 2017; McDermott et al., 2017) as the now adult

aims to avoid conflict. Other children act as caretakers and work to stop future abuse by the offender (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Abusers might also instruct children to abuse their mother (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Dialogues are therefore essential to healthy child-processing of IPA episodes (Visser et al., 2016). Such dialogue is often not possible in abuse situations, as these situations may limit maternal victim sensitivity and child cooperation (Visser et al., 2016). Without the ability to process abusive episodes, children have limited IPA understanding and emotional security (Visser et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

Abusive homes are more likely to produce harmful developmental effects (Cort & Cline, 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017), including future perpetration (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Fowler et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017). Exposed children demonstrate more violent behaviors and IPA perpetration than counterparts (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Hou et al., 2016; Semiatin et al., 2017). Correlation proves more significant for those who witness male, as opposed to female, initiated abuse (Islam et al., 2017). Cause for this connection is not clear since viewing IPA alone does not produce the same effects (Elmquist et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017). Social learning theory cannot explain continued abuse cycles as some children become resilient to intergenerational abuse, and do not go on to abuse their intimate partners as adults (Juffer et al., 2017; Sargent et al., 2016).

Attachment influences IPA perpetration (Boeckel et al., 2017; Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Maternal attachment mediator effect on abuse perpetration after witnessed IPA remains unknown (Cort & Cline, 2017; Dargis &

Koenigs, 2017; Islam et al., 2017). Insecure attachment to one's mother, the abuse victim, may be why IPA cycles continue (Boeckel et al., 2017; Cort & Cline, 2017). Insecure attachment is linked to perpetration, with witnessed partner abuse during childhood being the most prevalent predictor of IPA (Ruddle et al., 2017).

A mother's availability to discuss IPA with a child and provide comfort is limited during violent episodes, creating confusion for the child (Boeckel et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2016). Diminished maternal availability increases PTSD symptoms among child and mother (Boeckel et al., 2017; Rosmalen-Nooijens et al., 2017), even after abusive episodes. Child PTSD symptoms are associated with future perpetration (Boeckel et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2016). Poor maternal attachment may lead a child to seek comfort or guidance from the paternal caregiver. Children who witness abuse may, in turn, share their fathers' male offender belief women are an enemy (Ruddle et al., 2017). Given a mother's inability to appropriately bond to her child during and after trauma, maternal attachment is a necessary variable to explore in the link between male witnessed IPA during childhood and later perpetration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore maternal attachment influence on adult male IPA perpetration after witnessed parental abuse during childhood. The relationship between variables was to be determined by mediation analysis. Quantitative analysis is used for statistical analysis through a survey data collection strategy. The study sample was to consist of men 22–37-years-old who have witnessed father-against-mother IPA during childhood and may have perpetrated IPA in adulthood. I planned to measure

maternal attachment levels. Witnessed IPA was the independent variable. The dependent variable was IPA perpetration. I planned to assess maternal attachment as a possible mediator variable. Participation has been shown to increase when variables are self-reported (Murdoch et al., 2017). Therefore, all variables in this study were to be self-reported.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Is there a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$1): There is not a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_a1): There is a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does anxious maternal attachment mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$2): Anxious maternal attachment does not mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

Alternative hypothesis (H_a2): Anxious maternal attachment does mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Does avoidant maternal attachment mediate the relationships between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men?

Null Hypothesis ($H_0$3): Avoidant maternal attachment does not mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

Alternative hypothesis (H_a3): Avoidant maternal attachment does mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Attachment theory involves the infant-caregiver relationship (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Infants need consistent nurturing caregivers to develop healthy emotional relationships (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1958; Rodas et al., 2017). Should a child not feel attached to a caregiver, later bonds will suffer as the now adult is unable to trust relationships (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; McDermott et al., 2017).

Attachment theory is a prominent developmental psychology theory connected to healthy adult processing (Heylen et al., 2017; Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016). Children unable to successfully bond with a caregiver suffer negative mental health consequences (Christian et al., 2016; Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Domestic violence perpetration is connected to manipulation, anger, and jealousy affiliated with psychopathology (Wright, 2017). This study is founded in the connection

between unhealthy attachment traits and IPA perpetration.

Attachment inability creates anxiety among children (Widom et al., 2018). Anxiety formulates when a secure base is not formed (Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Anxious attachment most likely translates to other relationships (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Attachment anxiety may be formed when the mother figure, or abuse victim, cannot alleviate stress experienced from witnessed abuse (Cort & Cline, 2017; Visser et al., 2016). Paternal security has not been shown to mediate witnessed abuse effects (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Maternal attachment is a specific scope needing further exploration.

Attachment may influence the relationship between witnessed IPA in childhood and later adult perpetration. Insecure attachment diminishes trust in relationships (Casse et al., 2016). Maternal relationships with children are often hindered in abusive households (Park, 2016). Children need comfort after witnessing abuse (Crouch et al., 2017). The mother/child bond is a necessary part of development in attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1958). Without secure maternal attachment, trust, trauma-healing, and views about women may be altered.

Nature of the Study

I planned to conduct a quantitative study to explore the influence maternal attachment has on adult male IPA perpetration after witnessed abuse in childhood. I planned to collect demographic information from participants for the variable analysis. I planned to assess maternal attachment influence on later male IPA perpetration among IPA exposed youth through several questionnaires. I planned to measure abuse exposure

during childhood (independent variable) using the Maltreatment and Abuse Chronology of Exposure (MACE) scale, which was used in similar research in the past (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017). The Experience in Close Relationships- Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) has been used to assess participant perception of their relationship to another (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). I planned to assess child views on maternal attachment (mediator variable) by using the ECR-RS. I planned to use the Conflict Tactics Scale Revised- short form **(**CTS2S) to measure previous partner violence perpetration (dependent variable), which was similarly used in previous research (Semiatin et al., 2017).

I considered men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult a data source. I used voluntary sampling in this study. Voluntary sampling may increase participation (Lindberg & Zeid, 2018). I placed flyers in local probation/parole offices and counseling centers known to treat domestic violence offenders in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio. Population representation also increases with sample size (Kern et al., 2016). I planned to consider self-reported responses to the MACE, CTS2S, and ECR-RS data and evaluated the data through mediation analysis.

Population generalizability can be ensured through survey reliability and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I therefore relied on survey reliability and validity to ensure population generalizability. Construct validity, internal, and CTS2S factor structure are supported by CTS2 research (Semiatin et al., 2017). Suitable reliability for research analysis is present in the ECR-RS and represented in previous research (Cocoran &

McNulty, 2018). Strong test-retest reliability exists in the MACE scale, making MACE a viable maltreatment measure (Teicher & Parigger, 2015).

Definitions

The following research term definitions are provided for research clarity and a foundation for understanding:

Attachment: An affectionate and enduring relationship one individual forms with another (Ainsworth, 1969, p. 971). Attachment is to a specific person, occurring throughout one's lifespan without a necessity for romantic involvement (Ainsworth, 1969, p. 971). Attachment differs from bond as attachment occurs in the first years of life, whereas bonding occurs relationally throughout a lifetime (Boeckel et al., 2017, p. 1129).

Intimate Partner Abuse: A range of violent or nonviolent behaviors between those who are or have been partners, including those causing physical, psychological, or sexual harm (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). For this research, intimate partner abuse involved acts perpetrated by men against women.

Anxious Attachment: Anxious attachment involves anxiety or worry about the availability or responsiveness of one's mother (Theisen et al., 2018, p.143).

Avoidant Attachment: Avoidant attachment involves hesitation or level of discomfort opening up to one's mother or using her as a place of refuge (Theisen et al., 2018, p. 143).

Assumptions

I made assumptions during this study. For example, I assumed the participant population could be generalized to the larger population. Results are less beneficial if not generalizable to the larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participant population reflection coincides with generalizability assumptions. I also assumed that participants would be honest in their responses. Genuine survey question responses were essential to this study. I assumed that participants would give honest responses to demographic, witnessed partner abuse, attachment, and perpetrated IPA questions. I also made assumptions regarding my impartiality. I assumed my personal beliefs or assumptions would not affect research outcome. Though eliminating bias may be challenging, personal assumptions cannot impede result interpretation.

As with any retrospective analysis, it is possible recent life events have altered more distant memories. Retrospective surveys still serve as viable means for analysis of life events (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Teicher & Parigger, 2015). Therefore, I also assumed that accurate memories regarding witnessed abuse and maternal attachment would be shared. I also assumed there was an appropriate participation level for generalizable results. Reduced participation was a possibility given requirements and selection strategy.

Scope and Delimitations

I planned to include included adult men 22–37 years who reported witnessing father-against-mother IPA during childhood and may have perpetrated IPA in this study. In this study, I did not address the age at which participants witnessed abuse or

perpetrated abuse Scope was determined by the limited research addressing attachment influence on perpetrated IPA after witnessed intimate partner violence (Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016).

I also considered delimitations. I initially selected probation/parole offices and counseling centers in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio to distribute flyers. Accessibility was increased by probation/parole department and counseling center proximity. Large cities may offer more cumulative and diverse research participation, increasing population generalizability (Kern et al., 2016).

Another delimitation to the study may be that specific variables were not addressed. Maternal parenting behaviors are linked to IPA presence as parenting styles differ among abuse victims (Cort & Cline, 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2017; Martinez-Lora & Cruz, 2017). Mother IPA victims often exhibit harsh or avoidant parenting styles (Cort & Cline, 2017). Mothers may attempt abuse avoidance, making child development needs a lower priority (Cort & Cline, 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2017). Maternal parenting style would have been an unnecessary inclusion as the research focus was on child effect after witnessed abuse.

Other delimitations involved the type of participants selected for the study. Female-perpetrated IPA and young women who witness IPA were delimitations for this study. While women perpetrate IPA and witness IPA as children, I focused on the maternal attachment link to witnessed abuse and later IPA perpetration among men. The study focus is supported by previous research which determined that men are more likely to perpetrate IPA after witnessed abuse than women (Ruddle et al., 2017).

Limitations

This research may have been limited by deceptive survey responses. These would cause inaccurate IPA prevalence disclosure. Adults exposed to abuse as children may conceal victimization (Bottoms et al., 2016; Malloy & Mungo, 2016). Perpetrators may not accept their role in partner violence (Burnette et al., 2017; Ruddle et al., 2017). Deceptive responses may limit research validity and ultimately mitigate population generalizability. Study results may extend to diverse situations and understudied populations (Gustafsson et al., 2017).

The limitations posed may be reduced through valid research measures. I planned to use surveys for this study based on valid previous research use (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Jones et al., 2002). Necessary steps to reduce limitation effect were to be taken to ensure significant field contribution.

Significance

Many children witness IPA early in life (Etherington & Baker, 2018; Kiesel et al., 2016; Sargent et al., 2016). The connection between witnessed interparental abuse and later IPA perpetration has not been fully determined despite vast research (Elmquist et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017). The connection between witnessing abuse as a child and adult IPA perpetration can be greater understood through increased maternal attachment knowledge. IPA perpetration advancements may prevent the IPA cycle from continuing, sparing children future mental and emotional hardships associated with witnessing abuse.

The results of this study may encourage supplemental attachment therapy for IPA-exposed children (Park, 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016). Adverse effects could be addressed before batterer tendencies begin and while parental practices can improve (Marina-Lora & Cruz, 2017). Many abuser treatment programs contain information over 3 decades old (Ruddle et al., 2017). Offender treatment programs require trauma-informed practice (Semiatin et al., 2017). Trauma-informed practices may mitigate the views children develop about abuse during childhood (Ruddle et al., 2017). Therapeutic measures rebuilding maternal attachment may offer feasible IPA treatment methods (Park, 2016). Methods may further educate professionals striving to fully understand multi-generational IPA cycles (Cort & Cline, 2017), ultimately alleviating criminal justice system resources (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017).

Positive social change could result through reduced abusive episodes, improving child psychosocial development (Crouch et al., 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Fowler et al., 2016). Continued IPA likelihood increases for young men who witness interparental abuse (Foshee et al., 2016; Semiatin et al, 2017). Offender emotional need can be understood through assessment regarding moderating maternal attachment influence on child IPA exposure and later perpetration (Christian et al., 2017; Crouch et al., 2017; Park, 2016).

Summary

IPA takes place frequently in households regardless of class or culture (Boeckel et al., 2017; Chester & DeWall, 2018; Ruddle et al., 2017) and is a societal concern. Children exposed often suffer trauma similar to that experienced by first-hand victims

(Callaghan et al., 2016; Cao et al., 2016; Horn et al., 2017). Trauma from abuse exposure can last throughout a lifetime through different facets (Callaghan et al., 2016; Will et al., 2016). Further explanation into IPA-exposed young men who later perpetrate may lessen adverse effects experienced by future children (Cort & Cline, 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017). Positive social change may result from this research through reduced abusive episodes. Previous research has shown that a reduction in abuse would reduce federal funds required (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Healthier home environments may yield positive psychological developments (Crouch et al., 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Fowler et al., 2016).

Attachment theory is an appropriate foundation for IPA perpetration research (Godbout et al., 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016; McClure & Parmenter, 2017). Children who experience trauma have increased anxious attachment (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). Maternal attachment mediating effect on child IPA exposure and later perpetration can provide insight to offender emotional needs (Christian et al., 2017; Crouch et al., 2017; Park, 2016). The results of this study may shed light on the increased need for attachment therapy for children in abusive households (Cort & Cline, 2017; Park, 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016) before batterer tendencies begin. Study results may also create substance in the field regarding the maternal attachment link to IPA perpetration.

The framework for the study is presented in Chapter 2, along with a review of relevant literature. I investigated research that had been published in past 5 years. The review includes peer reviewed journal articles regarding attachment and IPA effects. In

the literature review, I highlight witnessed IPA, IPA perpetration, attachment, maternal attachment, and the combined interactions. I will also explore the research gap that I addressed in this study. I review witnessed IPA, perpetration, and maternal attachment in depth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

IPA is a pervasive social issue that affects diverse populations (Boeckel et al., 2017; Chester & DeWall, 2018; Ruddle et al., 2017). Children who witness IPA should receive the same attention and victims. Abuse cycles may be broken by directing attention to young, IPA-exposed men who are more likely to become offenders (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Hou et al., 2016; Semiatin et al., 2017). Female caregivers provide the strongest support and dependability to youth (Cort & Cline, 2017; Guimond et al., 2016; Clay et al., 2017). An assessment of maternal attachment influence on IPA perpetration after witnessed abuse may address child emotional needs prior to those children perpetrating abuse (Cort & Cline, 2017; Park, 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016).

In this chapter, I will provide the strategies that I used to search for relevant literature. I explored research related to specific IPA-related variables. The theoretical framework for this study was attachment theory, with specific attention given to attachment research related to IPA. In this chapter, I will also explain the other theoretical frameworks I used to assess IPA perpetration. I will give a reasonable basis for the use of attachment theory. I will provide an exhaustive relevant literature review through research related to specific variables. I discovered a gap in literature on the relationship between witnessed abuse, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration among men. The current study was necessary to alleviate gaps in current partner violence research.

Literature Search Strategy

I predominately chose psychological databases to garner research relevant to witnessed IPA in childhood, attachment, and IPA offender characteristics. Limited research regarding the relationship between these variables was available. Peer-reviewed journal articles from notable sources constitute the research in Chapter 2. I searched the following databases: Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Journals. I also searched engines to determine relevant sources. These search engines include Google Scholar and Research Gate. I searched for specific keywords in order to encompass literature regarding IPA and attachment, from the child witness, maternal victim, and offender perspective.

I searched for key terms by listed keywords of the article, within the title of the article, and within the abstract. Terms used to review the literature included *domestic abuse, IPA, domestic violence, DV, intimate partner violence, IPV, intimate partner abuse, IPA, spousal abuse, partner aggression, family violence, family abuse, witness, view, observe, bystander, child, children, youth, toddler, attachment, bond, security, secure, perpetrate, offender, abuse,* and *batter*.

I considered research published between 2016 and 2019 for this literature review. I included seminal works prior to 2016 to support theoretical foundation in attachment theory. The influence attachment has on relationship health was present in seminal and more recent articles. The depth of literature review and inclusion of seminal works account for the limited research results available.

I discovered that despite the cumulative articles considered, research specifically addressing the relationship between witnessed IPA in childhood, maternal attachment, and later IPA perpetration was minimal. Available research limitations resulted in the need to explore each variable independently. Another research strategy included coupling variables with IPA for insight on the IPA connection to the variable. I included research relevant to the subject matter in the literature review, starting with the theoretical foundation.

Theoretical Foundation

Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory was the theoretical foundation for this research. Attachment theory hypothesizes children need to connect to at least one caregiver through a consistent, supportive relationship in order to become healthy adults (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). An unresponsive guardian may lead to disordered behavior and even psychopathology (Christian et al., 2016; Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Attachment theory is a leading theory in developmental psychology (Heylen et al., 2017; Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016). Bowlby was initially considered founder of attachment theory (Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Mary Ainsworth has more recently received recognition as being a strong contributor to Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory (Van Rosmalen et al., 2016).

Bowlby (1958) noted the physiological, as opposed to social, needs of an infant for attachment theory development. These needs were specified to secondary drive, primary object sucking, primary object clinging, and primary return-to-womb craving

(Bowlby, 1958). Since the mother meets all the physiological needs, the mother is the first and sole form of attachment for an infant (Bowlby, 1958). By 3 months of age, a child already reacts more positively to their mother than to other individuals (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behavior occurs when the infant both happily recognizes and seeks the proximity of an individual (Bowlby, 1969). The child relationship with the mother occurs earlier, is stronger, and more consistent than with other individuals (Bowlby, 1969).

The mother serves as a secure base from which the child can gradually test independence through exploration (Bowlby, 1969). Security is necessary for the child to properly develop physically and emotionally through adulthood (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). A securely attached child may seem to take the mother for granted as the child is more comfortable with independence (Bowlby, 1969). Secure attachment is needed to form healthy relationship schemas for later adult relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Children who do not have a secure base in the form of attachment may look to other measures to fulfill those needs. For instance, a child may repetitively suck his thumb or overeat to counter insecurity (Bowlby, 1969).

Anxious attachment is a form of insecure attachment affiliated with fear of rejection or abandonment (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Anxious attachment is directly connected to psychopathic traits (Conradi et al., 2016). Impulsivity, a specific behavioral-lifestyle psychopathy trait, shows a positive connection to anxious attachment and fear of leaving (Conradi et al., 2016). Men with high anxious attachment associate negative partner interactions with overall relationship threat (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). The same men are more likely to exhibit behavior causing concern and

distress to their female partners, even though these same interactions boost the man's confidence in the relationship (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016).

Personality traits, lack of control, and fear of abandonment affiliated with unhealthy attachment may lead to other behavioral outbursts. Jealousy and anger are two predictors of IPA linked to attachment (Wright, 2017). Attachment anxiety is linked to relationship aggression (Godbout et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). Aggression is not always translated to physical abuse, as psychological aggression is also connected to attachment anxiety (Gou & Woodin, 2017; McDermott et al., 2016). The birth of a child enhances the risk for psychological aggression perpetration for males and females with attachment aggression (Gou & Woodin, 2017).

Adverse childhood experiences may also have connections to attachment theory (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Widom et al., 2018). Witnessing IPA is a traumatic event for most children (Godbout et al., 2016; Stover et al., 2017). Anxious attachment is developed by anxiety (Godbout et al., 2016) and most likely to influence general relationships (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Traumatic events in childhood lead to anxious attachment and prompt significant, negative mental health consequences (Widom et al., 2018). Familial dysfunction produces stress and anxiety (Crouch et al., 2017; Park, 2016) which may result in an unhealthy bond between parent and child (Bucci et al., 2017; Chorot et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2016).

The stress and anxiety developed from child adversity are linked to depression and reduced subjective well-being (SWB) in adulthood (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Depression and SWB after child adversity are mediated by avoidant attachment with

one's mother (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018). Despite previous research indicating paternal attachment influence on depressive symptoms, a similar mediating effect for paternal attachment was not found (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018). The most noticeable mediator was anxious attachment in general relationships. Paternal and romantic relationship attachment did not have any mediating effect (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). While Corcoran and McNulty (2018) determined the need for analysis outside of romantic attachment, a detailed analysis of a relationship attachment type was not performed.

Bowlby (1958) prioritized a child's need for maternal connection as the mother is the first and primary caregiver. If a mother is unable to recognize a child's responses and signals, unhealthy attachment is likely (Casse et al., 2016; Cort & Cline, 2017; Dayton et al., 2016). Experiencing abuse hinders a mother's ability to provide sensitive parenting and develop strong emotional ties with the child (Casse et al., 2016; Cort & Cline, 2017; Zhou, Cao, & Leerkes, 2017). Mothers also often feel the need to explain the unhealthy relationship dynamics of abuse to prevent a continued cycle (Visser et al., 2016).

Discussing the abusive episodes with an older child may be comforting to the mother (Jones & Vetere, 2017), but challenging to do since IPA influences the entire family structure (Visser et al., 2016). Mothers who experience abuse therefore struggle to educate their children on healthy relationships while avoiding tarnishing the child's relationship with the abuser (Visser et al., 2016). The child may further understand the experience of the abused parent through such communication, in turn enhancing attachment and assisting in youth recovery (Cort & Cline, 2017; Visser et al., 2016).

Poor attachment can affect other close relationships (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018; Godbout et al., 2016; Gou & Woodin, 2017). Similar to interparental violence exposure, caregiver attachment failure can have psychological and behavioral consequences, including psychopathology (Christian et al., 2016; Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Manipulation is a trait found in psychopathy (Christian et al., 2016; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017) and IPA perpetration (Katz et al., 2017). Inability to successfully attach to a caregiver also produces increased delinquency (Nordling et al., 2016), dissociation (Miller, 2017), and anxiety (Widom et al., 2018). These characteristics are all common in domestic abusers (Callaghan et al., 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Wright, 2017).

Bowlby (1944) made the connection between maternal attachment in young men and later criminal behavior. Through the examination of 44 juvenile criminals, Bowlby (1946) concluded 40% suffered separation from the mother figure, with 85% showing affectionless character. Similar trends occur in more recent research. Young male children exposed to IPA are 34 –54% more likely to become violent offenders (Ruddle et al., 2017). Witnessing IPA in childhood is a strong perpetration predictor among those with insecure attachment (Ruddle et al., 2017). Unhealthy attachment also leads to overall aggression in adulthood (Sogar, 2017; You & Kim, 2016). Insecure attachment may cause a child to conclude love is conditional (Casse et al., 2016; Dayton et al., 2016), enhancing the risk of anger and jealousy in later intimate partner relationship (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Wright, 2017).

Emotional Security Theory

Like attachment theory, emotional security theory (EST) involves necessary security between children and caregivers (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016). Mary Ainsworth incorporated William Blatz's EST in attachment theory production, advocating the need for a secure base for children to develop healthily (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). According to EST, parental conflict causes tension in child security and results in insecure future relationships for a child (Suh et al., 2016). Internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems resulting from poor attachment also result from poor security (Davies et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2017). Vulnerability to psychopathology, difficulties in self-regulation, and dominance share additional correlations with attachment and EST (Davies et al., 2016). Maternal roles are also highlighted in EST as a mother's insensitivity to a child is more likely to lead to negative developmental outcomes (Zhou et al., 2017).

Despite stark similarities and use of EST to develop attachment theory, EST alone does not explain psychological and behavioral consequences of witnessed abuse (Davies et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2017). Attachment theory has been incorporated into EST to enhance rationale for the mental process of a child regarding security (Davies & Martin, 2013). Insufficient security with one's father figure does not produce the same effects as a maternal caregiver (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Davies et al., 2016). Therefore, attachment theory is more suited to explain security developed in childhood as children need to attach maternally for appropriate development (Ainsworth, 1969; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Betrayal Trauma Theory

Betrayal trauma theory (BTT) is another necessary theoretical foundation to consider victim-offender relationship dynamic assessment (Gagnon et al., 2017; Hocking et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017). Abuse victims who rely on their offender are less inclined to view abuse as betrayal (Gagnon et al., 2017). Victimization by a well-known offender shows greater likelihood for future violence when compared to victimization by strangers (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Youth may be actively involved in IPA by assessing threat levels and engaging in resolution as the actual victim would (Etherington & Baker, 2018). These perspectives coincide with BTT as abuse requires a victim-offender connection to avoid future conflict (Gagnon et al., 2017). Relationship insecurity results from PTSD after abuse and can result in memory disruptions (Gagnon et al., 2017; Hocking et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017). Domestic violence cycles may be explained by the victim-perpetrator bond created through abusive memory disruptions when extent or relationship dynamics are not fully recalled (Gagnon et al., 2017; Hocking et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017).

Childhood trauma is also frequently linked to attachment (Crouch et al., 2017; Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Widom et al., 2018). Attachment theory fills in the gaps when BTT is used to explain adult insecurity after childhood trauma (Hocking et al., 2016). The victim-offender bond associated with BTT closely relates to attachment theory and may even help explain attachment necessity. Anxious attachment mediates the relationship between child maltreatment and negative adult outcomes even when considering BTT (Hocking et al., 2016). A child witnessing abuse may strive to connect

to the offender (father) to limit severity, thus failing to recognize the behavior as betrayal, and attach to the offender as opposed to victim (mother).

Social Learning Theory

The theory most frequently associated with criminal behavior is social learning theory (SLT; Cochran et al., 2016; Cochran et al., 2017; McRae et al., 2017). According to SLT, children repeat adult behaviors by imitating what is observed (Bandura, 1961). Youth who witness IPA are more likely to repeat abuse because they observe rewards for the behavior (McRae et al., 2017). In the IPA context, both the offender and victim behaviors may have been learned from an adult caregiver (Cochran et al., 2016). Young children may also learn to recognize emotional responses of the offender and subsequently develop their own behavior expectations (Repacholi et al., 2016). Children use emotional responses to inform themselves on how an offender would likely treat others, treat them, and how to respond to this threat (Repacholi et al., 2016). Young children might therefore learn offender traits more readily and determine offender traits are more beneficial than victim traits.

Although children who witness abuse are undoubtedly more likely to become abusers (An et al., 2017; Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Zhou et al., 2017), SLT cannot account for continued perpetration (Cochran et al., 2017; Juffer et al., 2017) as some males who witness IPA do not become offenders. Previous studies involving SLT fail to consider any mediating or moderating effects and focus on substance abuse as opposed to violent crimes (Cochran et al., 2017). Youth defer from engaging an angered adult, fearing the adult would also be angry with them in a similar situation (Repacholi et al.,

2016). Children would therefore be less likely to adopt offender angered traits if fearful, implying more variables are at play than just learned behavior. Attachment theory supplements SLT in the explanation for violent behavior among maltreated youth (Juffer et al., 2017). These factors combine to minimize the role SLT may play in continued IPA cycles after witnessed abuse.

Though EST, BTT, and SLT offer valid information regarding IPA perpetration, each theory alone cannot account for cycle continuance. Whereas the foundation of SLT involves violence continuation through learned violent behavior (McRae et al., 2017), EST and BTT more closely relate to attachment theory by incorporating the necessary bond between parent and caregiver (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Widom et al., 2018). Limited research is available on the connection between IPA and these theories. When IPA was considered, attachment theory was used to address research voids in many instances (Davies & Martin, 2013; Hocking et al., 2016; Juffer et al., 2017). A more comprehensive understanding of IPA perpetration and the continued cycle of abuse can be obtained by further research in attachment theory (Godbout et al., 2016; Wright, 2017). Attachment theory would best explain a connection between witnessed IPA in childhood and later adult perpetration.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

I supported the need for this study by the vast research on IPA perpetration. It is important to consider the weaknesses found in past research despite the knowledge gained. While a connection between witnessed abuse and later perpetration is established (Godbout et al., 2017; Narayan et al., 2107), consensus regarding which

variables influence perpetration is lacking. The type of child maltreatment is associated with IPA and general violence. The risk of later violent perpetration is increased for children who experienced greater physical violence themselves (Fowler et al., 2016; Godbout et al., 2017). Yet not all studies are consistent in this finding (Nikulina et al., 2017).

A connection between witnessed abuse and insecure attachment is established in previous research, along with a connection between witnessed abuse and later IPA perpetration (Godbout et al., 2017; Narayan et al., 2107). Yet, the maternal attachment influence on IPA perpetration has not been thoroughly researched (Cort & Cline, 2017). Many traits attributed to IPA offenders may stem from insecure attachment (Zhou et al., 2017). Anxiety and poor emotion regulation are linked to IPA offenders (Davoren et al., 2017). Maternal attachment may address the missing emotional security elements needed to break abusive cycles among children in violent homes. I justified the present study involving witnessed IPA, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration variables by the missing elements in previous research. Quantitative research methods may better establish trait comparisons for those who offend after witnessed IPA.

Witnessed IPA

Children exposed to psychological abuse encompassing IPA reported notable reductions in psychological well-being even before adulthood (Naughton et al., 2017). One psychological consequence may be child temperament, even at a young age. Emotional regulation is compromised in young children after witnessed abuse (Callaghan et al., 2017). Mothers exposed to partner abuse reported poor temperament in their infants

ranging from 6–8 months old (Edhborg et al.,2017). Specifically, mothers viewed their children to be unadaptable and to respond negatively to environmental changes and new routines. A statistically significant relationship exists between exposure to father-against-mother abuse and the ability to manage emotion in infants less than 1 year old as opposed to older children (Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). Inability to manage emotion may lead to further abusive tendencies (Wright, 2017).

Geyer and Ogbonnaya (2017) sought to better understand the relationship between maternal victim IPA and child emotional regulation. Maternal domestic violence services were hypothesized to improve maternal adjustment, and therefore child emotional regulation (Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). Child emotional regulation development is an essential assessment area as children are still developing their frontal lobes, the area of the brain responsible for emotional regulation (Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). Results did not significantly conclude abuse services mediate emotional regulation (Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). Analyses did conclude a statistically significant relationship between maternal victim IPA and poor child emotional regulation among children less than 1 year old (Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). In abusive households, early intervention is necessary to limit emotional deregulation among infants.

Psychological side effects may prevent a child from appropriately adapting to new life stages or environments should child trauma after witnessed IPA fail to be addressed (McDonald et al.,2016). Exposure to IPA creates significant dysfunction in child regularity, where adolescents score higher than their peers in psychological and social maladjustment and lower on overall adaptive skills (Diez et al., 2018). Maladaptive

experiences may vary between children. Positive adjustment after witnessed abuse occurred in 66% of children (McDonald et al., 2016). Children were better able to adjust after shorter periods of maternal victimization (McDonald et al., 2016). Positive adjustment was assessed in terms of psychopathological trait development, with the failure to develop psychopathological traits considered positive development (McDonald et al., 2016). Those children who did not display psychopathological traits did show signs of low self-worth and social aptitude (McDonald et al., 2016).

For the children with negative adjustment, 6% suffered severe maladjustment and 28% moderate maladjustment (McDonald et al., 2016). Ethnic or multiracial children were seven times more likely to suffer severely from witnessing intimate partner abuse (McDonald et al., 2016). Latino children showed increased signs of social resiliency when compared to other ethnic groups (McDonald et al., 2016). There is decreased risk for severe maladjustment when the abuser is the biological father of the children (McDonald et al., 2016). Results perhaps draw another connection between witnessed abuse and attachment, as children who remain in unseparated homes may be better able to cope with trauma.

The individual differences between children may influence resiliency after traumatic events. Gender may play a role in abuse response, as men struggle to relate to masculinity norms and women to caregivers (Callaghan et al., 2017). The family environment creates child expectations and emphasizes whether societal norms will be upheld (Callaghan et al., 2017). Individual personality traits may also influence adversity. Externalizing behaviors after witnessed abuse can partly be explained by personality

traits in youth, regardless of gender (Bozzay et al., 2017). Interpersonal theories, constraint, and cognitive control process impairments mediate the relationship between witnessed familial abuse and externalizing behaviors (Bozzay et al., 2017).

Witnessed IPA and IPA Perpetration

Abuse exposure in childhood is linked to later criminal perpetration (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017). Child age at exposure may provide further insight to the link between witnessed IPA and perpetration. Adolescence has shown to be a pivotal time in development as well (Fong et al., 2017). Interparental abuse is not lost on adolescents, who may struggle to formulate correct behaviors in their own intimate partner relationships (Neppl et al.,2017). The same adolescents may later struggle to raise their children in adulthood as relationship dialogues, stress-management, and constraint are hindered (Neppl et al., 2017). Therefore, those who have witnessed IPA through childhood and adolescence may have more prolonged life effects than those who solely witness IPA during childhood.

Child exposure during infant and toddler years has gained significant attention (Fong et al., 2017; Narayan et al., 2017). Although witnessed abuse influences child emotional development (Callaghan et al., 2017; Horn et al., 2017), age at witnessed IPA may have different effects on perpetration likelihood (Narayan et al., 2017). Abuse presence during infancy was not associated with later perpetration (Narayan et al., 2017), despite emotion regulation concerns for infants (Fong et al., 2017; Geyer & Ogbonnaya, 2017). Violent incidents as early as toddler or preschool years have a direct correlation to IPA perpetration and victimization (Narayan et al., 2017). Thwarted emotion regulation

during infancy may be corrected with proper consideration and the removal of abuse exposure (McDonald et al., 2016). The violence viewed during toddler years may be more challenging to remedy due to the internal social relationship expectations formed (Narayan et al., 2017).

Psychological consequences of witnessed familial violence are also correlated with IPA perpetration (Massa et al., 2017). Threat perception is one way in which a child may translate witnessed IPA to later relationship dynamics that result in abuse perpetration (Massa et al., 2017). Threat perception is further escalated by anger and hostility (Massa et al., 2017), along with jealousy (Wright, 2017) for those with insecure anxious attachment. Negative worldviews may increase viewed slights from one's partner as opposed to other individuals (Massa et al., 2017). Increased trauma anxiety may create increased relationship threat in later adult relationships (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Inaccessible parents may result in emotional child maltreatment, which is associated with later psychological aggression in relationships (Loucks et al.,2017).

Attitudes surrounding IPA may also influence whether perpetration occurs after witnessed abuse. Observing father-against-mother abuse may cause a young man to adopt views that abuse is justified (Fong et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017). Violent cycles may continue when young men who witness father-against-mother abuse determine actions are acceptable or even desired (Islam et al., 2017). This view aligns with previous discussions on potential individual differences in men who strive to maintain masculinity while interpreting IPA exposure (Callaghan et al., 2017). These psychological and

emotional consequences from IPA exposure are connected to abuse. However, not all young men become offenders.

Attachment

Attachment is an important element to better understand IPA. Attachment disruptions experienced by children in abusive homes likely further abusive cycles (Miller, 2017). Healthy adult functioning is created through successful attachment to at least one caregiver (Tarabulsy & Symons, 2016; Van Rosmalen et al., 2016). Abandonment insecurity is created when there is an inability to attach to a caregiver (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). This insecurity is a source of extreme anxiety associated with later IPA involvement (Godbout et al., 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016; Wright, 2017). Secure attachment mediates these effects (Smith & Stover, 2016). Attachment-based therapy may alleviate insecure attachment (Mousavi & Safarzadeh, 2016).

Unhealthy attachment is connected to reduced emotional control (Boeckel et al., 2017; Heylen et al., 2017; Wright, 2017). Abusers are often self-conscious and plagued by relationships concerns (Wright, 2017). The ability to manage stress may also be hindered by poor attachment (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Heylen et al., 2017). Young men with anxious attachment exhibit increased anger and poor emotional regulation, increasing likelihood for IPA perpetration (Wright, 2017). IPA and attachment anxiety are mediated by jealousy and anger in situations where privacy invasion was the form of IPA perpetrated, including cyber privacy violations (Wright, 2017).

Those with anxious attachment fear abandonment by loved ones (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Abandonment fear may be why men with anxious attachment are quicker to conclude relationship threat after a negative encounter with a partner (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Gaining control in the relationship alleviates these threats for men though they increase victim trauma for women (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Anxious attachment is closely associated with IPA offenders (McDermott et al., 2016). However, other forms of attachment create conflict avoidance rather than perusal (Bonache et al., 2017; Gou & Woodin, 2017; Wright, 2017). Statistically significant connections between anxious attachment and IPA are more often concluded (Wright, 2017).

Maternal Attachment

In attempt to prevent IPA reoccurrence, maternal and paternal attachment must be considered. The psychosocial side effects affiliated with witnessed abuse are not alleviated by paternal attachment, but maternal, avoidant attachment (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Victimized mothers show higher signs of stress, anxiety, and substance abuse (Fusco, 2017). Exposed children of those mothers are more likely to develop socioemotional problems in the areas of self-regulation, communication, compliance, adaptive functioning, interaction, autonomy, and affect (Fusco, 2017). Three factors mediated the relationship between witnessed violence and socioemotional problems: mother-child attachment, mother's emotional support from her social network, and overall family functioning (Fusco, 2017). The strongest mediator among factors was mother-child attachment (Fusco, 2017). Perceived maternal emotional support during

IPA may increase maternal availability and buffer child socioemotional problems (Fusco, 2017).

Maternal sensitivity is essential to child development, even in utero (Miller-Graff et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2017). Mothers must recognize infant emotional needs in order to promote wellness. History of trauma for the mother may also hinder interpretations of dissociative symptoms in children after witnessed abuse, ultimately hindering treatment possibility (Cohodes et al., 2016). Mothers in IPA situations are more likely to view infant facial expressions that are ambiguous as negative (Dayton et al., 2016). Viewing normal, neutral infant facial expressions as negative creates maternal insensitivity, as mothers are overwhelmed by their lived trauma and the perceived hardships of parenting (Dayton et al., 2016). These effects cause decreased maternal sensitivity to the child over time (Dayton et al., 2016).

Whereas IPA exposure is linked primarily to externalizing behaviors in children, internalizing behaviors are indirectly associated through diminished maternal sensitivity during stressful events (Zhou et al., 2017). Mediating effects of maternal sensitivity are mixed, however (Fong et al., 2017). Despite inconsistent findings in maternal sensitivity research (Cohodes et al., 2016; Fong et al., 2017), attachment security has been shown to stabilize after increased maternal sensitivity to a child (Suchman et al., 2018). Lack of maternal sensitivity plays a minimal role in child externalizing behaviors when maternal caregivers do not encounter stressful life events (Zhou et al., 2017). Intimate partner abuse was shown to negatively mediate maternal sensitivity in the first year of a child's life. However, the relationship between witnessed interparental conflict and child

externalizing behaviors was not mediated by maternal sensitivity (Zhou et al., 2017). Child internalizing behaviors were only viewed in distressing contexts surrounding IPA (Zhou et al., 2017).

Diminished sensitivity may be a result of unclear maternal roles and identity through the perpetrator's interference in the relationship between mother and child (Cort & Cline, 2017). Abusers may prevent attachment by preventing the basic physiological needs addressed by Bowlby (1958), such as breastfeeding (Visser et al., 2016). Further, societal norms place undue hardship on abused mothers to maintain positive parenting (Cort & Cline, 2017). A mother's ability to maintain healthy parenting practices in the midst of violence is often questioned (Ateah et al., 2016). Battered women are also vulnerable to abuser misrepresentations regarding their maternal capabilities (Cort & Cline, 2017). While these reductions in parenting ability belief may still promote secure attachment, insecure attachment through disorganized and resistant behaviors are also possible (Casse et al., 2016). Counseling for women that focuses on the blame placed on a mother in an abusive situation has been suggested in previous research (Cort & Cline, 2017). Improvements in caregiver identity and self-esteem are likely to translate to the child, limiting trauma from avoidant attachment.

Mothers suffering from IPA also have disrupted physical and emotional availability to their child (Boeckel et al., 2017). Disruptions create strained emotional regulation which show a positive correlation with abuse and child PTSD symptoms (Boeckel et al., 2017). Maternal attachment quality showed a positive correlation to maternal age (Boeckel et al., 2017). Maternal attachment quality decreases with increased

IPA exposure, poor maternal emotional regulation, and higher child PTSD symptoms (Boeckel et al., 2017). Sexual violence in relationships also reduced successful maternal attachment (Boeckel et al., 2017). Children may therefore be more likely to discredit abuse severity as parental abuse is a common occurrence in the home that is downplayed by both parties (Boeckel et al., 2017).

Decreased child belief in parental abilities may result in child coping strategy development. Child attachment insecurities from IPA exposure may fluctuate with maternal levels of support from a partner or others (Fusco, 2017), along with whether victim isolation was an abuse strategy (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Avoidance is attempted by many children. The desire to avoid future intimate relationships altogether (Louis & Johnson, 2017) and maternal attachment (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018) are coping mechanisms. Children are often used as pawns by both parties (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Mothers attempt to use a child to avoid abuse (Louis & Johnson, 2017), whereas fathers/abusers use children to maintain control (Louis & Johnson, 2017; Rivera et al., 2016).

Other children do not seek avoidance, but rather assert themselves as caretakers and demand the behavior stop (Louis & Johnson, 2017). In the study sample, 85% of participants recalled their children exhibiting turbulent behavior toward the abuser or those who resembled the abuser (Louis & Johnson, 2017). No participant reported child aggressive behaviors toward them after witnessed IPA (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Participants did express concerns about future violent behavior with partners, as the

abuser often put the child in situations to assault the mother who needed “to be disciplined” (Louis & Johnson, 2017, p. 42).

Women do not always recognize the influence their trauma has on children (Cross et al., 2017). Symptoms related to maternal PTSD may extend to the child through unwilling abuse involvement. Maternal PTSD predicts parenting stress and the potential for child abuse by the mother (Cross et al., 2017). Child externalizing behaviors rise after witnessed abuse when corporal punishment is also utilized (Fong et al., 2017). The same maternal PTSD, however, does not directly predict child-reported PTSD (Cross et al., 2017). Results may be related to misinterpretations children have for the abused parent (Pernebo & Almqvist, 2017). Attachment does play a role on PTSD symptoms in children. As maternal attachment decreases, PTSD symptoms in children increase (Boeckel et al., 2017). These interactions shed light on trauma also experienced by youth who observe IPA, along with the possibility for hindered attachment.

Communication between mother and child may reduce PTSD symptoms and improve maternal attachment (Visser et al., 2016). The emotion dialogue between mother and child is pivotal to child exposure recovery, as the child must be able to comprehend trauma through coherent events (Visser et al., 2016). Emotion dialogue is also essential to mental health and socio-emotional development (Visser et al., 2016). Child security levels may be enhanced based upon the meaning a child gives a life event (Visser et al., 2016). The emotion dialogue quality is diminished in those exposed to interparental violence (Visser et al., 2016). Diminished quality involved less child cooperation and reduced maternal sensitivity (Visser et al., 2016). Limited maternal availability after

experienced IPA may diminish the quality of emotion dialogues, resulting in reduced IPA comprehension and emotional security for the child (Visser et al., 2016).

Attachment can be obstructed even when mothers attempt to leave an abuser (Thiara & Humphreys, 2017). Child wellness serves as motivation for mothers who decide to leave their abuser (Jones & Vetere, 2017). Abuse often continues through other strategies after a mother leaves the home (Thiara & Humphreys, 2017). Abusers use child custody systems and the courts to maintain control over both mother and child (River et al., 2016; Thiara & Humphreys, 2017). Veiled threats may be made to a child during visitations (Rivera et al., 2016). Depression and PTSD symptoms may continue in the mother after physically leaving the abusive environment (Rivera et al., 2016). It is reasonable to conclude depression and PTSD symptoms would continue in the child as well, which would hinder maternal attachment (Boeckel et al., 2017).

The influence maternal attachment has on child development is not a conclusive subject matter. Emotional security research involves paternal dynamics as well. Paternal attachment has also been shown to mediate child security after parental conflict (Suh et al., 2016). In research where poor paternal bonding was the focus, paternal attachment was shown to better mediate child security than maternal attachment (Suh et al., 2016). Insecure paternal attachment may actually improve life functioning, however, as the child does not attempt abuser relations (Callaghan et al., 2017). Young men exposed to IPA may have distanced themselves from their abusive fathers (Callaghan et al., 2017). Those same young men stated they missed their victimized mother and never got to see her (Callaghan et al., 2017).

These statements speak to a stronger connection to their mother (victim), as opposed to father (abuser). Further, those attached to their mother seemed to reject the abusive behavior. Paternal attachment is less explored in current literature yet may be a potential path for future research. This study was focused on the maternal relationship after witnessed IPA based on the prevalent literature devoted to maternal attachment influence on successful child development.

IPA Perpetrator Characteristics

Many IPA offenders have traumatic backgrounds (Fowler et al., 2016; Godbout et al., 2017; Semiatin et al., 2017). More than 77% of intimate partner abusers report past trauma, with 62% reporting multiple traumas (Semiatin et al., 2017). Roughly 50% of participants who experienced trauma did so over an extended period of time (Semiatin et al., 2017). Twenty-seven percent of participants reported four or more traumas (Semiatin et al., 2017). Traumas included experiencing violent and criminal events, along with witnessing abuse toward others (Semiatin et al., 2017). Child victimization has been linked to increased aggression in previous research (Fong et al., 2017; Maneta et al., 2017; Sousa et al., 2017). Male IPA offenders show higher rates of child maltreatment as opposed to other violent offenders (Hilton, Ham, & Green, 2016). Results are not consistent, though, as only 15% of male perpetrator subjects reported physical or sexual abuse in childhood (Semiatin et al., 2017), informing IPA perpetration cannot be linked to child victimization alone.

Batterers also had an 11% likelihood of PTSD symptoms, resulting in increased substance abuse, depression, overall aggression, and relationship issues (Semiatin et al.,

2017). PTSD development is likely due to event trauma ratings. On a 7-point scale, participants reported an average rating of greater than five for perceived trauma or terror (Semiatin et al., 2017). PTSD was diagnosed in 10.9% of cases (Semiatin et al., 2017). Over 11% of participants met all three categories for PTSD diagnosis under the DSM-IV (Semiatin et al., 2017).

PTSD side effects are associated with IPA offending and call for attention to previous life trauma in IPA offender treatment (Semiatin et al., 2017). PTSD symptoms also coincided with emotional and behavioral deficiencies, along with poor relationship regulation (Semiatin et al., 2017). Emotional abuse perpetration was also reported by participants, including avoidance, jealousy, control, and dominance displays (Semiatin et al., 2017). PTSD scores also correlated with physical and sexual abuse causing injury (Semiatin et al., 2017). Abusers who exhibit PTSD symptoms are more likely to have greater frequency and violence in abusive episodes (Semiatin et al., 2017).

Exposure to violence is linked to violent offending (Richards et al., 2016; Yount et al., 2018). Witnessing interparental violence is associated with the intergenerational violence transmission along with other forms of child maltreatment (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Godbout et al., 2017). Intergenerational violence transmission has been explained by maladaptive socioemotional regulation (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017) and learned socialization processes (Godbout et al., 2017). IPA perpetrators also show greater criminal range that span from nonviolent to violent offenses and are often coupled with psychopathy (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Hilton et al., 2016). Children who witness familial abuse and are physically abused themselves are more likely to be generally

violent offenders (Fowler et al., 2016; Godbout et al., 2017). Offenders who previously witnessed abuse alone are likely to be general offenders (Fowler et al., 2016). Those generally violent offenders may be reenacting the trauma or suffering from stunted personal relationship development (Godbout et al., 2017). Yet, this hindered development in personal relationships may speak to avoidant, as opposed to secure attachment given general, as opposed to IPA, perpetration. Generally violent offenders abuse in greater context and are more likely to reoffend (Fowler et al., 2016).

The connection between child maltreatment and IPA perpetration was not present in all studies (Nikulina et al., 2017). Individual offender characteristics that may influence perpetration are evident in these results, including attachment, antisocial behaviors, and genetic factors (Nikulina et al., 2017). Gender norms are also a reasonable basis for IPA continuation. Men accept gendered masculine roles emphasizing control (Callaghan et al., 2017). Men who live in more equitable environments had lower incidents of intimate partner physical abuse (Yount et al., 2016). Raising children with equal gender norms may alleviate future physical abuse incidents between partners (Yount et al., 2016).

Dispositional characteristics of men may also influence the likelihood of abuse perpetration. Developmental approaches to IPA perpetration emphasize the fact that combined factors produce perpetration (Goodnight et al., 2017). Family abuse and jealousy are factors in abuse perpetration for young adults, separate from other developmental variables (Goodnight et al., 2017). Jealousy is known to increase odds of intimate partner aggression in men (Wright, 2017). Jealousy often stems from poor

emotion regulation (Wright, 2017). Hostility also mediates relationship between family abuse and later IPA perpetration, especially in instances with paternal abusers (Elmquist et al., 2016).

Psychopathic traits have similar association rates (Brem et al., 2017; Christian et al., 2016). Antisocial personality disorder is directly linked to psychological aggression and poor stress management (Brem et al., 2017). Controlling for antisocial tendencies in adolescence, psychopathic traits can still be affiliated with IPA perpetration in early adulthood (Goodnight et al., 2017). Psychopathic traits regarded as lifestyle components (impulsivity and irresponsibility) are linked to generally violent offenders, but not offenders who only perpetrate IPA (Theobald et al., 2016). Findings describe how IPA perpetrator emotional turbulence is intentionally directed toward loved ones, as opposed to being completely unable to regulate emotion.

Anxiety is a trait connected to psychopathology (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016) and intimate partner abuse (Davoren et al., 2017). Borderline personality disorder specifically mediates the link between anxiety and IPA perpetration (Davoren et al., 2017). Impulsivity is directly related to anxiety, creating intimate partner abandonment fear in abusers (Conradi et al., 2016). Anxious offenders are more likely to conclude a relationship threat in unnecessary circumstances (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Anxious men often perpetrate abuse to reinforce relationship security (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016).

Witnessing IPA, Attachment, and IPA Perpetration

Traumatic events in childhood and later IPA tendencies can be linked to attachment (Godbout et al., 2016; Smith & Stover, 2016; McClure & Parmenter, 2017). Mistrust was also a research variable (LaMotte et al., 2016). Mistrust is a symptom of anxious attachment as anxiety propels fears of abandonment (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Mistrust significantly mediated the relationship between early trauma and IPA in men (LaMotte et al., 2016). Mistrust mediated only psychological IPA in female offenders (LaMotte et al., 2016).

Attachment anxiety is strongly affiliated with IPA in adulthood after childhood trauma (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). Sexual, physical, psychological, neglect, and witnessed interparental violence are all linked to interparental violence perpetration and victimization (Godbout et al., 2017). Witnessed abuse was the only form of child maltreatment to be directly linked to IPA perpetration (Godbout et al., 2017). When anxious attachment is high, trauma experienced in childhood is more likely to result in IPA perpetration and victimization (Smith & Stover, 2016). Secure attachment may buffer individual traumatic life experience outcomes (Smith & Stover, 2016). Avoidant attachment correlated to relationship satisfaction and not necessarily abuse, as those with avoidant-attachment tend to avoid relationships and conflict overall (Godbout et al., 2017). Further research garnered toward anxious attachment in male IPA offenders after witnessed abuse in childhood may shed light on continued abuse cycles.

Anxious attachment may lead to individual anxiety. IPA perpetration correlates with emotional and physical abuse, neglect, and anxious personality (McClure & Parmenter, 2017). Childhood traumas produced similar effects in participants for anxious attachment style among college students 17–23 years (McClure & Parmenter, 2017). Increased assessment regarding anxiety prevalence in IPA cycles among varied age ranges may mitigate future abuse.

Complexities affiliated with witnessing abuse in childhood, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration in adulthood are evident. Additional variables arise in IPA offender trait consideration for men specifically. IPA should be assessed from a different perspective that still shows the connection to established offender traits. Maternal attachment may be the missing variable considered in IPA perpetration. Moderation is also an important study approach. Moderating variables are used in several studies to show the relationship strength as opposed to relationship occurrence (Smith & Stover, 2016). This research study may address the gap regarding why some young men who witness abuse later perpetrate IPA as opposed to others.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis is a common research method to assess the relationship between variables in further detail. While two variables may be correlated, examining the reason for the relationship adds further implications and insight to the study (Leth-Steensen & Gallitto, 2016). Mediation analysis is also common in IPA-related research (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018; Naughton et al., 2017; Wright, 2017). Previous mediation research focuses on the link between adverse child experiences, such as witnessed IPA,

and later child development maladjustments (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018; Naughton et al., 2017). While some studies consider the influence of variables leading to IPA perpetration (Wright, 2017), witnessed IPA during childhood is rarely posed as the independent variable. Further, maternal attachment is not the mediator variable. Mediation analysis is needed to assess the maternal attachment influence on IPA perpetration among men after witnessed IPA during childhood.

Conclusions from Literature Review

Research involving witnessed IPA in childhood, maternal attachment and adult IPA perpetration is limited. After review of the literature, I concluded that anxiety has a clear on domestic violence perpetration after trauma in childhood (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). Relationships between psychopathological traits (Theobald et al., 2016) and insecure attachment (Christian et al., 2017) in IPA offenders is also present in research. Based on recurring attachment influences, future maternal attachment research is a necessary consideration for abuser assessment (Boeckel et al., 2017; Cort & Cline, 2017). Several studies focused on adolescence or young adults (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017). Maternal perspective regarding victimization (Smith & Stover, 2016), difficulties in maternal bonding (Boeckel et al., 2017) and maternal abuse regulation (Cort & Cline, 2017) are also present. Sample diversity iss present in child trauma studies (McDonald et al., 2016) but lacking in attachment and IPA offender trait research. This study may increase attention to maternal attachment and the relationship between IPA offender traits

correlated with unhealthy attachment after witnessed partner abuse. The information gathered may shed light on the gap in current literature.

I justified the current study based on the gap in previous research. Stability is needed for healthy development after witnessed abuse (Cao et al., 2016). In environments where abuse occurs, insecure maternal attachment increases negative developmental odds (Cao et al., 2016). Uninvolved or avoidant parents can translate to emotional maltreatment in children (Loucks et al., 2017). Children may interpret a detached mother figure as emotionally unavailable and therefore the cause of maltreatment (Casse et al., 2017).

The probability of IPA perpetration increases among young men who have witnessed familial abuse (Foshee et al., 2016; Semiatin et al, 2017). Provided the continued ways maternal attachment is hindered by IPA (Cort & Cline, 2017; Thiara & Humphreys, 2017), maternal attachment should be a necessary focus for child therapy. Offender treatment programs are also outdated (Ruddle et al., 2017) and predominately view such men solely as offenders rather than victims (Semiatin et al., 2017). Additional focus should be placed on child emotional needs after witnessed abuse (Christian et al., 2017; Crouch et al., 2017; Semiatin et al., 2017) as these children may become offenders.

Maternal attachment therapy may also prevent future IPA cycles and improve overall child wellness (Cort & Cline, 2017; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). Maternal attachment therapy may alleviate professional burden to reduce IPA cycles (Cort & Cline, 2017). The criminal justice system would also be relieved (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017) with nearly $20 billion saved annually (Brem et al., 2017).

Relationships between witnessed abuse in childhood and later perpetration are known (Fong et al., 2017; Massa et al., 2017), along with links between witnessed abuse and poor attachment (Thiara & Humphreys, 2017; Visser et al., 2016). Despite the emotionally driven character traits affiliated with IPA offenders also being present in children with insecure attachment, maternal attachment irregularities are not adequately affiliated with IPA perpetration in current research.

Risk assessment is common in forensic psychology, and lethality assessments are more recently practiced for IPA offenders (Yaxely, Norris, & Haines, 2017). Understanding offender characteristics is necessary to prevent future intimate partner violence (Theobald et al., 2016; Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2017). Elements of IPA perpetration remain unknown in current literature, and there are discrepancies in research findings. While connections to domestic violence after witnessed abuse have been made (Godbout et al., 2017), why some men continue the abuse cycle remains unclear. Research discrepancies exist regarding whether traumatic childhood events play a role in later intimate partner violence (Nikulina et al., 2017). Despite childhood trauma being associated with IPA perpetration (Semiatin et al., 2017), most men who suffer maltreatment do not go on to offend (Godbout et al., 2017). Some studies place greater weight on individual child experiences as trauma does not always influence abuse perpetration (Nikulina et al., 2017).

Existing research does not combine variables relatable to this research. General trauma verbiage is used as opposed to specifically addressing witnessed abuse (LaMotte et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). Attachment is only

considered in terms of general or romantic attachment as opposed to solely maternal connection (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017; Smith & Stover, 2016). The impact of witnessed abuse was infrequently linked to maternal attachment (Cort & Cline, 2017; Thiara & Humphreys, 2017). While offender trauma was considered through a variety of life events (Semiatin et al., 2017), the link between maternal attachment and perceived trauma severity in children was vaguely made (Louis & Johnson, 2017; Visser et al., 2016).

Summary

Despite research available on the variables related to this research study, the combined review of maternal attachment influence on IPA perpetration after witnessed abuse in childhood remains unexplored. Consideration for the mother role in overall child development may alleviate the risk for continued abuse perpetration in adulthood. The current study may fill a research gap regarding IPA perpetration. Future treatment implications from this study may prevent child trauma through witnessed abuse, victim trauma through abusive episodes, and IPA cycle continuation by adult men. Criminal justice implications are also possible through diminished funds required to resolve IPA (Brem et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). These combined factors may elicit social change to better child lives.

An exhaustive literature review regarding known relations between relevant variables involving witnessed family abuse in childhood, maternal attachment, and adult IPA perpetration by men took place in Chapter 2. Implications for this study in terms of gap fulfillment were addressed. The planned quantitative research design allowed for

relationships between desired IPA and maternal attachment variables to be explored. The foundation for mediating variable use was supported by current research through quantitative methods. Further methodology, population, and sample selections will be presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood, maternal attachment, and adult male IPA perpetration. I planned to gather quantitative data through responses to survey questions. I planned to use a quantitative method to thoroughly evaluate the relationship between variables, including mediation effects. Survey methods also ensure participant willingness to readily disclose personal matters (Murdoch et al., 2017). I will discuss the research method in Chapter 3. I initiate the chapter with an explanation on variable selection, followed by design rationale. Further, I address target population along with a thorough recruitment method description.

I will also discuss data collection. I will describe the survey instruments proposed (MACE, CTS2S, ECR-RS), along with reliability, validity, and instrument endorsement mechanisms. I will identify measurements and calculations for each variable (witnessed IPA, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration), restated RQs and data analysis procedures. Further, I will assess research integrity through threats to validity and any potential ethical concerns regarding participation, data analysis, and researcher bias.

Research Design and Rationale

The independent variable was witnessed father-against-mother IPA during childhood. The dependent variable was adult perpetration of intimate partner abuse. I planned to consider the mediating effect of maternal attachment to offer a potential reason why some men who witness IPA go on to perpetrate while others do not. The

population of interest was to be men 22–37 years who have witnessed and perpetrated IPA. Variable relationships were to be examined through a cross-sectional design. The time required for longitudinal design was not possible for this study, as monetary and data analysis restrictions prohibit such a design. Many youths in abusive homes live transient lives (Thiara & Humphreys, 2017). This fact was another reason a longitudinal design was not plausible.

Despite the inability to perform a longitudinal study, notable contributions to the forensic psychology field can be made through the results of this research as statistical significance can be determined through quantitative research methods. The proposed mediation analysis may shed light on the risk of IPA perpetration after poor maternal attachment among men who witnessed such abuse in childhood. Correlational analysis is common in IPA research (Burnette et al., 2017; Wymbs et al., 2017), given that it would be unethical to recreate abusive behaviors through an experimental design. Further, retroactive maternal attachment analysis, along with current IPA behavioral episodes, cannot be manipulated by experimental design.

Methodology

Population

I intended for the population in this study to be adult male IPA perpetrators 22–37 years who have witnessed father-against-mother abuse during childhood. I selected the age of 22 –37 years to represent Millennials born between 1981 –1996 who now equal more than 25% of the nation's population (United Stated Census Bureau, 2015). Millennials were born and raised after law enforcement's view of IPA changed from a

private matter to one requiring public attention (Zorza, 1992) and coincides with the national average age of IPA perpetration, 33 years (Broidy et al.,2016). Ohio is representative of the national average, with 65% of IPA cases being offended by those 18 –40 years (Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, 2017). Men who witness IPA as children are also likely to become perpetrators by the time they are 23 years old (Narayan et al., 2017).

I planned to elicit a sample from this target population. Offenders who meet the criteria would qualify as participants. Participants may be currently, or previously on probation/parole for IPA or other offenses. I determined a target sample size through review of previous mediation analyses given the unknown population size.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

This research study was to take place in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio. I achieved sampling through voluntary responses to recruitment flyers placed in probation/parole offices and counseling center lobbies. I also posted flyers on Facebook pages of groups who self-identify as IPA perpetrators. Voluntary sampling has been used in previous studies to assess the relationship between attachment and crime (Lindberg & Zeid, 2018). I used purpose sampling by placing flyers in areas hoped to attract participants meeting the criteria. Further, respondents were given the opportunity to share flyers with others who meet criteria, resulting in an element of snowball sampling as well. These sampling strategies were necessary to reach the desired sample size for the study.

I considered inclusion and exclusion criteria to reach the desired sample size. Results are better generalized to the larger population by a sampling frame with inclusion and exclusion criteria. I included men 22–37 years who have witnessed IPA in childhood and volunteered for the study. I initially did not plan to have IPA perpetration as a criterion for this study so I could assess the connection between witnessed IPA and differing maternal attachment with diverse levels of IPA perpetration. I excluded women, men, those under 22 years or older than 37 years, and those who have not witnessed IPA during childhood from the study.

I also considered the sample size needed for this research. Standard power analysis is often not conducive to mediation analysis given the software and expertise needed (Hayes, 2017; Schoeman et al., 2017). Hayes (2017) deferred to the work of Fritz and MacKinnon (2007), who surveyed 166 articles using mediation analysis, comprising 189 independent samples. Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) reference the Causal-Steps Test from Baron and Kenny as a test of mediation. The four-step analysis is used to determine if even partial mediation is present. Three of the four steps must be true in order for one to conclude mediation (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Using the Causal-Steps Test, the median sample size among the 166 articles was 159.5 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). The desired sample size for this study, then, was to be 160 participants. While sample size for mediation analysis may vary greatly, 160 participants coincide with the range of sample sizes previously studied (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Dargis & Koenigs, 2017).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The planned recruitment process took place in probation/parole departments and counseling centers in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, Ohio. I included information on the flyers that a doctoral student is seeking participants for a study regarding the relationship between witnessed IPA, maternal attachment, and later IPA perpetration. I included the implications for social change. Survey participation was anonymous and voluntary. I planned to request gender, age, and ethnicity as demographic data to ensure participant qualifications and consider any further variable connections.

Willing participants were to respond to the researcher email listed on the flyer, who would provide the Survey Monkey link. Participants were to first verify inclusion criteria. I received informed before any data was collected. Participants were to inform of their consent by reading the consent agreement on the survey website and marking their consent. I provided my contact information so participants could inquire about any questions or concerns. I planned for a copy of informed consent to automatically be populated for the participant. Another copy was kept for researcher documentation.

I planned to give participants the opportunity to request paper surveys through U.S. mail by contacting me through the email address on the flyer. Paper surveys via U.S. mail may have been necessary as many individuals do not have steady access to a computer or the internet. I planned to mail a printed survey to any participant who requested one, along with a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope with no return address to maintain anonymity.

Personal participant information was not disclosed on completed surveys and therefore anonymity was maintained. I provided consent information in the same verbiage regardless of digital or paper format. I provided participants information regarding research timeline, along with result viewing opportunities. I also offered participants an opportunity to ask questions and the deadline to respond to the survey.

I provided participants with resources for coping with any trauma triggers during or after survey completion. Despite potentially tragic information disclosure, survey participation may also be cathartic. Resources to address these emotions were necessary. It was not required for me to follow up with participants although participants may have desired to contact other resources. I also offered for the participants to contact me or proceed to the provided website for study results.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Maltreatment and Abuse Chronology of Exposure

Witnessed IPA during childhood was to be measured by the MACE. The MACE is a 52-item scale that includes 10 subscales and was used in research by Dargis and Koenigs (2017). Specifically, I planned to use scale elements that related to witnessed IPA between parents in this study. Participants were to give *Yes* or *no* to survey questions, such as *Saw adults living in household push, slap, or throw something at mother*, as stated in the research of Dargis and Koenigs (2017). (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017, p. 175). The more *yes* responses, the more interparental violence viewed as a child (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017).

MACE was developed for the retrospective assessment of traumatic incident during childhood (Teicher & Parigger, 2015). Limitations in previously accepted instruments, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) were considered in MACE development (Teicher & Parigger, 2015). Test-retest reliability for MACE is strong, with severity .91 and multiplicity .88 (Teicher & Parigger, 2015). Time did not influence reproducibility (Teicher & Parigger, 2015). MACE validity is also strong, as correlations between survey responses and trauma symptoms were stronger than ACE and CTQ instruments (Teicher & Parigger, 2015).

Some of the previous literature has criticized retrospective life event assessments. New life experiences may alter memories, producing varied perceptions about a past event. Little evidence has been presented to substantiate these claims, making MACE an appropriate instrument to explore witnessed IPA in childhood (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017; Teicher & Parigger, 2015). Dargis and Koenigs (2017) used MACE to retroactively measure both witnessed and experienced domestic abuse during childhood among criminal adult men. Witnessed abuse during childhood was successfully measured by MACE, concluding a significant association between witnessing domestic abuse and later adult psychopathy (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017). The MACE has retroactively measured domestic abuse among criminal adult men in past research (Dargis & Koenigs, 2017). Therefore, MACE was likely to adequately measure witnessed IPA from childhood in this study

Experience in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures

I planned to measure maternal through the ECR-RS. Participants were to self-report views on maternal attachment through a shortened version of the ECR-RS. A 7-point Likert scale is used for the ECR-RS, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 7 being *strongly agree* (Theisen et al., 2018). An example question is *I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person* (Theisen et al., 2018, p.143). I planned to determine the level of closeness to one's mother or maternal caregiver by higher-rated responses to the questions.

The ECR-RS is a variation of the original Experience in Close Relationships (ECR). The ECR-RS specifically measures anxious and avoidant attachment in a variety of close relationships (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018). The ECR-RS offers nine questions for each relationship type, resulting in 45 total questions (Cocoran & McNulty, 2018). Several studies have used single dimensions of the survey, although typically used to assess romantic attachment (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Acceptable reliability and validity exist for the ECR-RS (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). Cronbach's α range from .85 to .92 (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018). The ECR-RS has been used to specifically study maternal attachment (Theisen et al., 2018). Therefore, I reasonably concluded that the reliability and validity of the ECR-RS to assess maternal attachment would be a secure.

Conflict Tactics Scale Revised- Short Term

IPA perpetration was to be measured by the **(**CTS2S). The CTS2S also uses a Likert scale, however consisting of 8 coded points (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Breakdowns relate to the times the respondent has been abusive toward an intimate partner in the past year, such as *1* for once, *2* for twice, *3* for 3–5 times, *4* for 6–10 times,

5 for 11–20 times, *6* for > 20 times, *7* for not in the past year, but it did happen before, and *8* for this has never happened (Straus & Douglas, 2004). A total of 20 questions are asked in the instrument (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Increased number scales will relate to higher incidents of DA perpetration. To consider abuse severity over length of relationship, respondents were to be asked to answer how long they have been in their current relationship, such as *1* for less than six months, *2* for 6–12 months, *3* for 1–3 years, *4* for 3–5 years, and *5* for more than 5 years.

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was originally developed by Straus in 1979 (Jones et al.,2017). A revised version of the CTS (CTS2) was developed in 1996 (Jones et al., 2017). The CTS2 was developed to quantify family contention and is the most well-known and used instrument in family conflict measurement (Jones et al., 2017). In 2004, Straus and Douglas created a short form of the CTS2 for limited testing time (Straus & Douglas, 2004). Reliability assessment is challenging for the CTS2 as behavior fluctuates across time and circumstance (Jones et al., 2017). The CTS2 has strong internal reliability (>.74), despite limited research on test-retest reliability (Jones et al., 2017). Internal consistency of .68-.84 has been established in previous research (Jones et al., 2017).

Previous research has shown that sibling and parent-child CTS2 versions both hold strong construct validity (Jones et al., 2017). The inclusion of violence motives and conflict tactics of offenders, as physical violence is more prominent in the CTS2, may improve content validity (Jones et al., 2017). The original CTS2 and the shorter forms both contain concurrent validity. The perpetration correlation of .77 to .89 may be

overestimated since the short forms of the instrument include items with higher correlation (Jones et al., 2017). The CTS2 has been translated into many different languages and used in many countries. While the reliability remains strong, , cultural differences may decrease validity (Jones et al., 2017). Few research studies have been published with the CTS2 in languages other than English and many studies involve female assessment (Jones et al., 2017). Despite minor improvements possible for the CTS2, previous research has shown strong reliability and validity for IPA perpetration assessment (Semiatin et al., 2017). Western Psychological Services provided permission for the CTS2S to be used in this study.

Operationalization

I planned to measure witnessed IPA, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration. I used variable operationalization to develop an adequate interpretation. Witnessed domestic abuse has been defined as viewing an incident, or reoccurring incidents, involving controlling, violent, or threatening behavior between parents (Home Office Circular, 2013). Witnessed IPA was operationalized by the same definition. I defined witnessed IPA as father-against-mother abuse in this research. Maternal attachment is operationalized as a deep, ongoing relationship with one's mother (Ainsworth, 1969). It is important to differentiate between attachment and bonding, as a bond is throughout life and attachment refers to initial connections in childhood (Boeckel et al., 2017). IPA perpetration involves a similar definition as witnessed IPA, while perpetration involves the act of committing.

Data Analysis Plan

I planned to use the IBM SPSS Statistics software to analyze data. IBM SPSS is a noted statistics program for social science research. I planned to transfer data into SPSS after it was collected. It is necessary to input data accurately. I planned to take careful consideration to ensure no data was missing and the data was accurate. I then planned to run statistical analysis through the program. Data was to then be evaluated in response to the RQs posed below:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration?

$H_0$1: There is not a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration.

H_a1: There is a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration.

RQ2: Does anxious maternal attachment mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men?

$H_0$2: Anxious maternal attachment does not mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

H_a2: Anxious maternal attachment does mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

RQ3: Does avoidant maternal attachment mediate the relationships between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men?

$H_0$3: Avoidant maternal attachment does not mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

H_a3: Avoidant maternal attachment does mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men.

I planned to use a SPSS method called PROCESS, developed by Andrew Hayes, which involves a multiple regression approach and bootstrapping (Hayes, 2017) for mediation analysis in this study. I planned to use bivariate regression to initially test correlations between witnessed IPA during childhood and later IPA perpetration in adulthood (RQ1). I planned to run a separate bivariate to determine any correlation between witnessed IPA during childhood and maternal attachment levels (RQ2 & RQ3). I then planned to run multiple linear regression to determine whether IPA perpetration was mediated by maternal attachment after witnessed father-against-mother abuse.

Threats to Validity

It is important to consider any threats to validity prior to data collection in research. Generalizability to the larger population, or external validity, could be reduced by a failure to acknowledge IPA presence. The population sample may also reduce external validity. It is possible the sample will not represent the population. Participants may possess similar individual characteristics since voluntary sampling was used. Therefore, the study results may not be generalized to the larger population. Participants who have been charged criminally for IPA may not represent the larger IPA offender population who may have fewer abusive incidents. Offenders may also not wish to participate.

Internal validity should also be evaluated in any research. My selection of operational variable definitions may limit internal validity for this study. The definition of IPA may not thoroughly be conceptualized given the many ways an individual may exhibit control over another. Therefore, content validity may be reduced. Further, many factors can contribute to IPA perpetration. Other personal characteristics and life events that may potentially influence survey results can threaten internal validity. Bias is possible in self-report measures and therefore may pose another threat to internal validity. A participant may also possess bias through a desire to recall his maternal relationship as positive and current behavior as less severe. I provided full anonymity to hopefully mitigate participant bias.

Internal validity concerns may also take place during the data collection process. I initially offered participants two different ways to take the survey in order to accommodate those without internet access. This accommodation could create different results between methods as participants may be more likely to complete an online survey in one sitting. Internal validity would be limited through the selection process if I failed to include those who do not have internet access. Internet access could also influence external validity because the sample would not represent the larger population.

Threats to construct validity may be reduced through instrument reliability and validity. Previous research regarding Type I and Type II mitigations alleviates construct validity concerns in this research. I concluded that the statistical analysis and generalizability for this research would be accurate given previous research involving the reliability and validity of the CTS2S, MACE, and ECR-RS.

Ethical Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was a mandated ethical procedure. I obtained Walden University IRB approval (09-10-19-058534) prior to any data collection. I contacted probation departments and courthouses after IRB approval to ensure ethical guidelines were met. I sought male IPA perpetrators through research flyers after IRB approval. I provided participants who decided to take part in the study my contact information to ensure any questions were answered. Participants had the opportunity to thoroughly review consent descriptions, contact the researcher for any clarifications, and select whether he agrees, or does not agree, to participate all while remaining anonymous. I stated in the original consent documentation that participants may stop participation at any time without any consequences, and participants may keep a copy of the informed consent.

I designated paper surveys by a randomly assigned number associated with the participant. I placed that number on the return envelopes to maintain anonymity. I did not collect the IP addressed of online survey participants to maintain their anonymity. I provided thee online option to increase participation and maintain confidentiality for those who may be hesitant contact me via phone or provide a home address. I planned for both survey options to produce higher involvement rates. I planned to use numerical labeling to maintain data purity.

I provided participants with PTSD helpline resources should the survey re-traumatize the participant. It was important for participants to have stable mental health

after survey completion. I provided PTSD helpline information I also encouraged participants to ask any questions during the debrief.

The original sample size needed for this study was 160 participants. Participants may be hesitant to disclose information regarding childhood exposure, maternal attachment level, and IPA perpetration occurrences. I therefore ensured participants that their participation was anonymous, and all information would be kept confidential. I notified participants that no probation/parole officer or counselor would have access to the survey responses even though flyers were placed in probation/parole offices and counseling centers in specific cities. I determined recruitment locations based on ease of sampling as opposed to professional involvement since many IPA offenders are required to return to counseling or probation meetings. Online remained in the online database prior to data analysis. The online database and access to the surveys was password protected. I placed returned paper surveys in a locked storage locker separate from any personal matters. I ensured only that only myself and university faculty had access. Data will remain stored for a minimum of ten years to comply with research policy.

Summary

I discussed the quantitative research design in Chapter 3. I provided the methods to quantify and understand statistical relationships between witnessed DA during childhood, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetration. I also provided detailed reasons for the quantitative data selection, research design selection, and methodology. I explored the data collection process, with focus on validity and ethical considerations. This level

of detail was provided so the study may be replicated. Results to the study will be explored in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Current Study

Introduction

Those who experience IPA suffer severe emotional traumas, including PTSD (Boeckel et al., 2017). Even though children who witness IPA exhibit similar symptoms (Horn et al., 2017), they are rarely viewed as victims of the abuse itself (Nicholson & Lutz, 2017). Specifically, male children are more likely to continue IPA cycles (Semiatin et al., 2017). While the link between witnessed IPA and IPA perpetration has been researched (Fowler et al., 2016), attachment research in this realm has not focused on witnessed abuse (Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017).

Understanding the influence maternal attachment has on young men after witnessed IPA may explain continued cycles of abuse (Boeckel et al., 2017). Whereas anxious attachment is connected to abuse, avoidant attachment has been less likely to show a connection (McDermott et al., 2017). Given that this insecure attachment is linked to IPA offenders, further inquiry into the impact of maternal attachment was needed. Both the abuser and society place blame on the mother for failing to maintain appropriate parenting while experiencing abuse (Cort & Cline, 2017). Previous research has shown that as abuse increases, so do symptoms of PTSD in children (Boeckel et al., 2017). However, maternal attachment decreases (Boeckel et al., 2017). Children in homes where IPA occurs may share their father abuser's views against the mother (Ruddle et al., 2017), attempt to avoid the experiences overall, or take on the role of caretaker by attempting to limit any future abuse against their mother (Louis & Johnson, 2017).

I will review study details, including the transition from a quantitative to a qualitative study, in chapter 4. I will also describe the study setting. and present participant demographics, data collection, analysis, and study results.

Transition From a Quantitative to Qualitative Study

I originally developed a quantitative study to explore the influence maternal attachment has on men who witnessed abuse as a child. Research questions included: Is there a significant relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult male IPA perpetration? Does anxious maternal attachment mediate the relationship between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men? Does avoidant maternal attachment mediate the relationships between witnessed IPA during childhood and adult IPA perpetration among men?

While I originally developed a quantitative study, several factors contributed to the transition to a qualitative study. Creswell (2009) noted that research design is based on the nature of the problem, the researcher's experiences, and the study audience. Therefore, this study evolved due to the necessary adjustments after the study was under way. Researchers must often balance data collection with the resources available and the evolution of the true study nature. This was the case in this study.

I began data collection by placing the designed and approved flyers in counseling center and probation office lobbies. A total of 18 surveys were completed via Survey Monkey out of the 160 surveys required. Several other participants attempted, but did not complete, surveys. I then attempted to adjust the research study to capture participants who may or may not have perpetrated IPA from a variety of additional areas.

After 37 weeks, several adjustments to recruitment strategies, and only 11% of surveys completed, it was necessary for me to reassess the research design. Following a careful review of the study, research goals, and submitted surveys, I made the determination that the study would be best suited as a qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, study. I designed the original research questions to coincide with the relevant theory and to assess whether maternal attachment mediated male IPA perpetration after witnessed IPA as a child. This deterministic philosophy and theory-verification approach in which the researcher seeks the most scientific approach to coincide with theory is known as a postpositivist worldview (Creswell, 2009). After further review of the submitted surveys, participant selection, and overall study audience, I concluded that participant's individual experience regarding the influence maternal attachment had on their current relationships or IPA perpetration would be more beneficial to advocacy groups in the field thana mediation effect. I therefore adjusted the study to focus on the understanding individuals have of their own lived experiences, which is known as a social constructivist worldview (Creswell, 2009). Although a mediating effect is an important consideration in research, current research has also shown that adolescent perception of parenting can contribute to violent behaviors (Dimler et al., 2017). Participant perception of their experiences therefore seemed to better align with my research goals.

I adjusted the research questions to reflect the current study goals. The research questions were as follows: How do adult men, who viewed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult, view the relationship with their mother? How does the relationship

between men, who witnessed IPA as children and perpetrated IPA as an adult, and their mother influence their current intimate partner relationship?

I adjusted the research flyers to reflect the ability to participate in an interview (Appendix A). In response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, my participant recruitment area was extended nationwide via Facebook. I posted flyers on counseling-related Facebook groups. I compensated participants with a $25 Amazon gift card for their full participation. I developed semistructured interview questions to capture the phenomenological information (Appendix B).

Setting

Interviews took place via phone after potential participants called the phone number listed on the flyer. I conducted each interview in a closed-door home office to ensure privacy. While most participants did not disclose their individual locations, they were either alone or in quiet settings, one participant mentioned being in a separate room and not wanting their significant other to hear. Another participant said that they were on break at work. Although noise could be heard in the background, the participant confirmed they were able to speak privately and felt comfortable proceeding with the questions. Neither the participants nor I were interrupted during any of the interviews.

I did not post the flyers to any Facebook pages in which I had an affiliation and no other solicitation occurred. I compensated participants were compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card. Two participants referenced the gift card at the start of the interview. While the gift card may have been incentive to participate in the study, most participants

did not refer to the gift card. Further, the incentive did not appear to influence answers to any questions, and therefore the results of the study.

Demographics

Participants in the study self-identified as adult men who were 18 years of age or older, witnessed father-against mother abuse (including physical violence) as a child, to being controlling, threatening, or even violent in romantic relationships, and being able to take part in an interview. I captured these requirements in the inclusion criteria of interview and answered prior to the start of each interview. Eight adult men (*N*=8) participated in the study. Two participants did not feel comfortable sharing their exact age when asked, but verified they were over 18 years of age. For the six participants who did provide their age, the average age was 36.67 years. The other two participants were also likely in the same age range of 30– 40 years of age based on their life stories and years in a steady relationship. Participant race was not specifically requested. However, one participant volunteered that they were Indian and another that they were Black.

Other important demographic information for this study included the type of abuse exhibited and the relationship status or length of their current relationship. Of the eight participants, four stated they were controlling, two stated they were violent, and two did not wish to disclose or were unclear. Those two participants did verify that they exhibited abusive behavior with partners. Six participants stated they were currently married. One participant stated they have been married just over 3 years. Two participants stated they were in committed relationships, one of which was just over 7 months and the other for approximately 9 years as they dated through high school.

Data Collection

Data consisted of eight semistructured interviews with participants. After a change in research methods and continued attempts to recruit participants, COVID-19 further affected recruitment and therefore data collection. Further consultation with the study chair resulted in the suggestion that participants be compensated for their interviews. I received IRB permissions to expand my recruitment area outside of Ohio to states who were, at the time, least impacted by COVID-19. Walden University IRB approval (09-10-19-058534) was obtained prior to data collection. After I posted the updated flyer with compensation to several Facebook groups, participants began to come forward, and outreach to other states was no longer necessary. Based on the online nature of sampling, participants came forward from several parts of the United States and even Canada. I implemented snowball sampling to reach participants, and several participants stated that they became aware of the Facebook flyer through their friends as they shared similar life experiences.

Participants contacted me through the Google Voice phone number provided on the flyer. It should be noted that some participants also used a Google Voice phone number to contact the researcher. This was likely done to further anonymity. I used an audio recording app was used to record each interview. While I asked the participants through the consent form to allow for up to 1.5 hours for the interview, the average interview took 42 minutes. The time of each interview varied based on the comfort level of participants, and therefore the level of detail they wished to provide. I asked participants follow-up questions, such as to elaborate, based on responses. In addition to

inclusion criteria, I received consent from each participant via phone prior to the start of each interview. I took general notes during the interview to facilitate further questions. I later transcribed interview audio for data analysis. To my knowledge, no other recording of the interviews took place.

Participants did not show signs of discomfort during the interview process. Several participants expressed their appreciation for the interview questions as they provided an ability to recall and connect with their past experiences of witnessed abuse. Two additional potential participants contacted me but were unable to take part in the study. One participant was in a relationship with a male, as opposed to female, partner. Another participant experienced technical difficulties to where he could not be understood. After three attempts to communicate, I informed the participant they would not be able to proceed with the study.

Data Analysis

Data saturation occurred after the completion of the eighth interview. Thus, the ability to understand how adult men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult view their relationship with their mother, and the influence of that relationship on their current intimate partner relationships was established through semistructured interviews with eight participants. I analyzed data through an interpretive phenomenological method. The interpretive phenomenological method poses that transcripts are analyzed individually and then cohesively to determine potential consistencies (Smith et al., 2012).

To begin the analysis process, I transcribed individual interviews by listening to the related audio file and reviewing written notes. From there, I listed each interview question in a document, along with the participant's response to each question. I used direct quotes as often as possible to capture the true essence of the information shared from the participant's perspective. I completed this process for each of the eight participants. I then created a separate document to list the interview questions again with relevant responses from each participant under each interview question, including direct quotes. This process ensured individual responses were independently captured, so that I only determined any themes after interviews were reviewed individually. This process is necessary for phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2012). I then captured themes and subthemes based on recurring words, phrases, or experiences of the participants. Four themes and 12 subthemes were established. The following themes were identified: felt connect to mom, feel they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship), feelings regarding impact on relationships, and feel thankful for the steps they took to cope (Table 1).

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Felt connected to mom	Felt they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship)	Emotions regarding impact on relationships	Felt thankful for the steps they took to cope
Felt as if mom is/was their whole world	Feel they must be the caretaker/protector	Perceived their experience had limited impact on their relationships	Felt that external guidance helped improve their relationship
Felt disconnected from father due to father's alcoholism/ absence	Perceived they portray masculine stereotypes	Perceived their experience positively impacted their relationships	Felt that they have better communication with their partner
Feel that they learned a lot from mom	Felt they need to be overly involved and present	Felt they would have been worse (potentially more violent) with current partners (had their experience been worse)	Felt they can go to mom for advice

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases can be defined as responses received from one or some participants but did not result in any of the major themes or subthemes. One participant

informed me that they caught their wife in an affair, and therefore felt divorce was imminent. This participant tended to display even more affection for his mother and disdain for his wife when compared to other participants. Yet, consistent themes still emerged within the responses to where I was able to capture themes and subthemes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential part of qualitative research as I must be able to show that the information provided is accurate. According to previous research, several necessary elements of trustworthiness exist and must be demonstrated in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is key to trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness, and specifically credibility, can be strengthened by prolonged engagement, member-checking, reflexive journaling, and triangulation. I demonstrated credibility in this study by participant confirmation that the information shared with me was their own lived experience.

Prolonged Engagement

Information shared with a researcher may be altered due to the simple fact that the researcher is not part of the group or community being questioned. I must therefore make attempts to build rapport with participants and consider any reactions based on the researcher's role alone. This rapport building is supported by previous literature (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). I asked participants introductory questions in order to build such a rapport prior to the start of each interview.

Member-Checking

Based on the anonymous nature of the study, I was not able to conduct member-checks as possessing and utilizing participant email address would have hindered their anonymity. Considering the importance of member-checking, I frequently repeated responses to participants and asked participants throughout the study if I understood their response(s) correctly.

Reflexive-Journaling

Researcher bias is often managed through reflexive journaling. I used reflexive journaling to help manage any bias. By documenting participant responses multiple times in a variety of ways, reflexive journaling allowed me to be mindful as themes developed. This process is considered critical to credibility (Vicary et al., 2016).

Triangulation

Triangulation involves the use of two or more sources for information that can be achieved by considering information from several different perspectives (Carter et al., 2014). Triangulation can therefore enhance credibility by ensuring the information comprised from several participants is comprehensive. I achieved triangulation in this study by gathering eight participant perspectives and assessing for any cohesive or competing themes.

Transferability

The goal of all research is to contribute to the field of study. Research methods must often be replicated to show external validity and further enhance the subject knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick descriptions are thorough descriptions of the research and central assumptions are used to help enhance transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used descriptive words to not only question participants, but from the participants themselves to garner themes and sub-themes. I was able to aid transferability to future research through the use of descriptions as researchers will be able to compare the descriptors gathered. I was able to provide a clear account of the data and process through audio-recording the interviews, transcribing each interview individually, assessing all interviews for commonalities, and then documenting said themes accordingly. I used direct quotes as much as possible to help identify themes and sub-themes between participants.

Dependability

Dependability is captured through stability in the data and research process (Houghton et al., 2013). Dependability likewise further influences external validity and is shown by the careful conceptualization of the study, collection of data, and interpretation of findings by the researcher (Houghton et al., 2013). I implemented a transparent process through an audit trail that outlined all steps and events during the study. Future researchers and committee members will benefit from this process as they will be better able to review and comment on the research process and dependability.

Confirmability

I established confirmability, or the accuracy of the data and interpretation, in this study. Confirmability also emphasizes the objectivity and therefore trustworthiness of qualitative data, which may lend itself to bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used reflexive journaling and an audit trail to show the care in documenting and coding the data. This practice was based on previous literature so that information can be traced back to the original participant (Mertens, 2014). Whereas I used an audit trail to show full transparency, the use of reflexivity, involves a systematic approach to the researcher's subject knowledge given that researcher often study areas they are knowledgeable or passionate about, can be found in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I captured the data and process through the audio recordings, reflexive journaling, and audit trail so objectivity can be determined.

Results

The purpose of the study was to understand the perceived level of maternal attachment for men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult, and the perceived impact that had on their adult romantic relationships. I used a qualitative method to gather data. I posed two research questions: How do adult men, who viewed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult, view the relationship with their mother? How does the relationship between men, who witnessed IPA as children and perpetrated IPA as an adult, and their mother influence their current intimate partner relationship? I asked participants five main interview questions and 20 other sub-questions. I asked follow-up questions as needed based on participant responses.

I asked approximately 25 interview questions of the eight participants. Participants provided statements related to their lived experiences regarding their relationship with their mother after witnessed and perpetrated IPA and the impact their maternal relationship has had on their current intimate relationships. I captured the following four themes from participant's responses: felt connected to mom, feel they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship), feelings regarding impact on relationships, and feeling thankful for the steps they took to cope. I determined themes based on repetitive or aligned responses in the same content area. I identified twelve sub-themes based on responses from participants. The themes and sub-themes revolved around feelings and perceptions of the participants.

Research Question 1: How do adult males, who viewed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult, view the relationship with their mother?

I identified one overwhelming theme related to this research question, which was that participants *felt connected to mom*.

Theme 1: Felt Connected to Mom

Seven out of the eight participants discussed a strong connection to their mother despite witnessed IPA during childhood. Participants had feelings that their mom was a large part of their world, that they felt disconnected from their father, and that they learned a lot about life and relationships from their mother.

Sub-Theme 1.1: Feel as if mom is/was Their Whole World

Several participants expressed how much of a role their mother played, or continues to play, in their lives. Specifically, P1 stated they view their mother as their

"guru" and "I look at my wife as a second mom." P2 stated, "My mom is my hero," "I did everything with my mom," and "She is everything to me." P2 further stated, "I cherish my mom so much and can never take her for granted." P3 stated, "I try to be comfortable [with wife] as I was with my mother." Participants further discussed their "good" relationships with their mother, with P6 stating they were 100% comfortable with their mother but only 70% comfortable with their wife. P6 stated, "If I can't tell [wife], I can tell mom and she will understand." P7 stated their mother is "very cool to be with and I talk to her a lot," and P8 described their mother as loving, supportive, and dependable. These phrases show the strong connections participants felt with their mother despite the abuse witnessed.

Sub-Theme 1.2: Felt Disconnected From Father due to Father's Alcoholism/Absence

Participants also spoke about their relationships with their fathers, and the lack of connection experienced. P1 stated, "I can't remember one day he played with me, came to school for parent teacher [conference], etc. No financial [support]. No household work." P1 also stated, "I always had fights with dad because [he] would drink and ask for money." P5 informed that his mother actively tried to limit contact with his father. P5 said, "She didn't want us to spend time with him because she was afraid he would influence us in the wrong way." P6 stated, "He worried about himself and was drunk." P7 stated, "I was not close with [my] dad at all. The entire way he treated mom was bad. [You] can't beat my mom and expect me to like you. No."

Sub-Theme 1.3: Feel that They Learned a lot From mom

Several participants also stated that they felt they learned a lot from their mother and how she handled the adverse situations with their father or father-figure. Participants shared that they learned how to treat and understand women. P1 stated:

> Mom made it easier to be with [my] wife. I learned a lot of things in my short time with mom - to treat with woman as respect, participate in [the] household and chores. It's not just mom's job to take care of the child, a man's too.

P5 shared, "She always advised me and always told me over and over not to end up like my dad…the kind of man I should never be. Never beat [my] wife." P3 stated, "I learned good from her," and P7 specifically shared that their mother taught them to "keep pushing" and to "fix things." P7 directly stated, "I go to mom for advice," and "She was an example for me." P8 shared the guidance his mother gave him in life overall, including relationships, by saying, "She taught me about experiences my whole life," and "She gave me great guidance to life right now." P8 further stated that his mother taught him to care for his friends and everyone, including loving himself.

Research Question 2: How does the relationship between males, who witnessed IPA as children and perpetrated IPA as an adult, and their mother influence their current intimate partner relationship?

I established three themes related to how the relationship between the male participants and their mothers influenced their current intimate partner relationship. The themes included: feel they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship), feelings regarding the impact on relationships, and feel thankful for the steps they took to cope.

Theme 2: Feel They Fulfill a Masculine Role (With mom and Present Relationship)

Several participants felt that they had a masculine role to fill when it came to their mothers, and ultimately their romantic partners. I broke this masculine role down further into three sub-themes that included: feeling they must be a caretaker, perception that they portray masculine stereotypes, and feel that they need to be overly involved with their current intimate partner.

Sub-Theme 2.1: Feel They Must be the Caretaker/Protector

Participants expressed concern for the overall safety of their mothers and current partners. Some participants related this back to their experiences as a child. P5 shared the most detail in this area and stated:

> It was more of a result of what I experienced of parents. I probably wouldn't be so overprotective of her…. Every girl I was overprotective of them now and then because that's what mom asked me to do - protect women, be there for them.

P5 further said, "I tend to be very overprotective of partners" and "I feel same as mom - I wish I could have done more. I am glad I can do that for my wife now and am doing best I can." P1 connected support to financial security and the fact that his mother provided for his father. P1 now financially supports his family with "six figures" while his wife is a stay-at-home mother. This desire to care for and support their partners extended through hardships. P7 stated that despite their current hardships with their wife, "I'm trying my best to still support her." P8 stated that they "worried about" their partner's safety when they were away.

Sub-Theme 2.2: Perceived They Portray Masculine Stereotypes

As an expansion of the masculine roles to play, participants also perceived that they fulfilled those masculine roles. For example, P4 stated, “With my experiences, I think initially kind of there were roles I had to play.” When asked to elaborate, P4 stated, “having to be in control all the time. Be ‘the man’ in the relationship.” P4 stated that meant being in control. Several other participants also acknowledged controlling behavior, including P1, P2, and P6. P2 stated, “My mom had a boyfriend, and he was ‘the man’ and had another wife,” and “I control everything that happens between me and my girlfriend…she can’t control me because I’m the man in the relationship.” Also, “I am the head.” P1 stated, “I tend to be controlling. I don’t want to do it, but I know I do at times. I want things done my way.” P6 shared, “I don’t tend to take bullshit from women because I know what my dad used to do. I don’t want to let it take over me and before I realize it done something I didn’t want to do.” P1 also looked to cultural norms as a way for men to behave. P1 stated, “Being Indian, I do have a little of those elements in me…temperament and controlling at times, but I think I have gotten better.”

Sub-Theme 2.3: Feel They Need to be Overly Involved and Present

In combination with the protector role and perceived masculinity, participants also said that they felt the need to be present and involved in their current relationships. P5 said that had their childhood experience not occurred, they would be “fine with them [partner] out there with someone else and wouldn’t call every now and then thinking they’re not safe.” P5 further identified themselves as “being too clingy without even knowing it” and said, “Makes me feel like she might be in trouble if not there.” This feeling was echoed by other participants. P4 said, “Support may mean being over

involved to me now. She [mom] was always over involved in what I was doing and who talking to." P8 shared, "I feel I should be with her always. Want to be with her asap." P1 also associated one's physical presence with the demonstrations of care but as it related to his partner. P1 stated, "her (wife) monitoring me and cares for me. That means she actually loves me." P3 also stated that his mother's and girlfriend's frequent communication with him "shows they care."

Theme 3: Feelings Regarding Impact on Relationships

Most participants had strong feelings regarding how their experience witnessing IPA as a child and subsequent relationship with their mothers influenced their adult romantic relationships. Three sub-themes emerged: perceived their experience had limited impact on their relationships, perceived their experience positively impacted their relationships, and feel they would have potentially been more violent had they childhood experience been worse.

Sub-Theme 3.1: Perceived Their Experience had Limited Impact on Their Relationships

The overwhelming number of participants did not believe witnessing IPA as a child and their relationship with their mother had any impact on their current relationship. P1, P2, P6, and P7 all directly stated that witnessing IPA as a child and their relationship with their mother did not really impact their current relationship. When asked, P1 said, "Not really at all." P2 stated, "I don't think that is the case. I don't take advantage of anyone. I am considerate." P7 stated, "It doesn't at all."

While participants did not perceive there to be much impact on their later relationships, further statements by participants provided direct examples of impact. For example, P6 said, “My mom and dad are two different people, and me and my wife are different people and a different generation. No.” P6 also stated, though, “I let it [experience] impact lifestyle with women.” Further, P3 initially stated:

> I think I took 98% and I left out the 2%. The 2% is the guy trying to hit her and her not trying to do anything about it. I took the caring and good parts entirely. I left out that 2 % lately.

However, while P3 stated he tries not to let his childhood experiences affect his relationship, he also stated, “I was in three relationships before and didn’t go well because of my experience as kid. Comparing to relationship now, it generalizes among relationships I feel.” P3 further said:

> I noticed there are bits of particles left. If mom was single after dad passed and did not see anyone, I would only have good parts and not the bad parts. Good parts were easy to keep, but the bad parts…. I was in the middle and drug in between and it was difficult to stop.

Similarly, when asked about any potential impact, P4 stated, “I can’t think of a strong connection.” P4 also said, “If it didn’t happen at all I think childhood would have been a lot more normal and less trauma to work through” and “I want to say it does. I think I’m less open and trusting of people in general. A need for attention.”

Other participants were more indifferent in terms of impact. Yet further statements also spoke to experiential influence. P5 stated, “I can’t really say” when asked

about how his experience with his mother may have influenced his comfort level with his wife. However, P5 also stated he "probably wouldn't be so overprotective of her [wife]…that came from experience with my mom" and "I know I crossed boundaries with that sometimes from my parents." P8 said, "In some ways, I think I could just take actions and do things without thinking…can't forget some of the things and do think it's part of behavior."

Sub-Theme 3.2: Perceive Their Experience Positively Impacted Their Relationships

Although most participants did not feel their experience and maternal relationship notably influenced their current relationship, those who did eventually acknowledge an influence stated they were positively impacted. P1 stated he did not develop negative habits from his experience. P1 said, "It made me more self-aware of the negative habits I have" and "It was good for me what happened…making six figures in the U.S." P6 said, "If it impacted it was in a positive way" and that he "learned to understand women." P7 also stated that the experience and relationship dynamic affected him "in a positive way." P8 stated it taught him to "carry out actions and not rely on mom to solves things. Taught me a lot."

P2 shared the most information in this area. P2 said, "It did not affect me negatively" and "I think it really taught a lesson for me. I use that to correct mistakes." P2 also stated:

> I take that as guidance. I saw bad relationships and that with my mom and Boyfriend that probably influenced girlfriend, and I amend my ways and try not to do things she [girlfriend] don't like and not have that impact our

relationship.

Sub-Theme 3.3: Feel They Would Have Been Worse (Potentially More Violent) With Current Partners (had Their Experience Been Worse)

Several participants seemed to focus on the violence as opposed to other forms of verbal or emotional abuse witnessed or experienced. This translated to their perceived success in not being violent or "worse" themselves. P4 directly stated, "I think it could have been worse." When asked to elaborate, P4 said, "If the violence was worse when a child, I would be more violent. I was very violent as a kid…if it [violence against mother] continued, I think I would be [more violent] as an adult." P1 stated, "Growing up, I wanted to make sure I wasn't like my dad" and "I think I would be more cocky, arrogant, and a real male chauvinist and not appreciate women in society." P7 shared that he came home to find his wife having an intimate relationship with another man. P7 stated that he cannot relate to his father because "I can't imagine my dad would have handled seeing that" implying that his father would have been violent. P8 said he is "better now" than he was in the past.

Theme 4: Feel Thankful for the Steps They Took to Cope

In addition to the themes previously addressed, participants also spoke to the steps they took to cope with their experience and alter their behaviors. Three sub-themes were presented in this category: feel that external guidance help improve their relationship, feel that they have better communication with their partner, and feel they can go to mom for advice.

Sub-Theme 4.1: Feel That External Guidance Helped Improve Their Relationship

Two participants specifically spoke to guidance they received from others. P1, who immigrated to the United States, said that seeing how others in North America treat women was "positive reinforcement". P1 stated:

> Every time I look at someone like a woman, I think I have a lot of respect for them in what they go through in a male-dominated society. Even in the U.S., [it is] male-dominated and women go through a lot. [They do] not [get] the same pay in U.S. or Canada.

P3 stated, "I saw a therapist about this. So now, I will raise my voice but never actually hit her, or raise a hand, or throw things…I have stopped it [violence] completely now."

Sub-Theme 4.2: Feel That They Have Better Communication With Their Partner

Participants expressed that improved communication with their partners helps them cope and handle troubling times in their relationships. For example, P3 said that his girlfriend calls him "24/7 in a good way." P1 said, "I try to support myself by doing my fair share of chores and taking care of my daughter, time with her." P4 stated that he tries to communicate with his girlfriend more and "open up and talk" like they did earlier in their relationship. P4 said, "I try to be more patient with her because I knew dad was very aggressive, and a short fuse, and violent. I try to be less of that." P8 stated, "I think we need to solve it without fighting. Be calm. Solve it mutually…figure out what happened." P5 said that his wife,

> talks to me often, and she shows me a lot of the time that everything will be fine. It's more reassurance she gives me that they are all fine, children are all fine, she will be fine. It makes me feel much better. I'm willing to learn and grow that way.

Sub-Theme 4.3: Feel They can go to mom for Advice

The mothers of participants still played a key role in the ways participants stated they coped or grew from their experiences. Multiple participants stated they often go to their mother for advice about their current relationship. P6 said, “As much as I grew up in a violent home, I learn from it and learn every day. At times I seek advice from mom.” P7 stated, “I go to my mom for advice. Mom is the one person who doesn’t want me to divorce.” P8 stated his mother continues to support him by “sharing things, advice, sharing about family.” P5 stated:

> She would always advise me and always told me over and over not to end up like my dad…the kind of man I should never be. Never beat your wife. She was right. I think it took many advise to hear and tried to use that in relationships.

Summary

A total of eight adult men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult participated in the study. I did not ask any o direct information related to witnessed or perpetrated abuse during the interviews. Participants confirmed that they were over 18 years of age, with the median age being 36.67 years, and were in a relationship with a female partner. Participants could speak and understand English well enough to take part in an interview. Participants interested in the study contacted me through the phone number listed on the recruitment flyer to maintain anonymity. I posted recruitment flyers to Facebook pages involving counseling and batterer support. I conducted semistructured interviews with each participant after they verified the inclusion criteria and consent was received. I audio recorded each interview for transcription purposes.

I established four themes from the interview responses that directly related to the research questions posed for the study: felt connected to mom, feel they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship), feelings regarding impact on relationships, and feeling thankful for the steps they took to cope. In chapter five I will provide an interpretation of the results outlined in chapter four. I will provide implications for social change to counseling and other agencies who addressed IPA witnessed by male children will be provided. I will also explore limitations to this study and avenues for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

I implemented an interpretative phenomenological study to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, especially in the form of maternal attachment, of adult men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult. I aimed to provide further understanding regarding the influence maternal attachment has on adult romantic relationships of men. Men exposed to IPA as a child are more likely to continue IPA as an adult (Semiatin et al., 2017). The connection between witnessed IPA and perpetration has been previously researched through variables unrelated to witnessed IPA and attachment (Gonzalez-Mendez et al., 2017; Stefan & Avram, 2018). Attachment between a mother and child may be hindered after IPA (Cort & Cline, 2017), ultimately affecting emotion regulation in the child (Boeckel et al., 2017). Previous research has shown that as IPA exposure increases, PTSD symptoms in a child increase and maternal attachment decreases (Boeckel et al., 2017).

The eight adult men who participated in the research study confirmed they witnessed IPA as a child by either a father or father-figure and perpetrated IPA against a female partner as an adult. Four themes emerged from interview discussions that included: felt connected to mom, felt they fulfill a masculine role (with mom and present relationship), emotions regarding impact on relationships, and felt thankful for the steps they took to cope. In this chapter, I will analyze these themes and subthemes presented in connected to previous research. I will summarize the research results, assess any

limitations to the current study, discuss study implications, and offer suggestions for future abuse that coincides with the current study.

Interpretation of the Findings

While research exists regarding witnessed IPA during childhood, maternal attachment, and IPA perpetrated among adult men, there is minimal research that combines these variables. Previous research has shown a connection between increased anxiety after childhood trauma (Godbout et al., 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2017), along with insecure attachment (Christian et al., 2017) among IPA offenders. Previous literature focused on social learning theory as a basis for the continued cycle of abuse, negating the fact that many who witness abuse do not go on to perpetrate. Given the ways maternal attachment is hindered by IPA (Cort & Cline, 2017; Thiara & Humphreys, 2017), assessing the lived experiences and maternal attachment of adult men who have witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult was a natural next step). Therefore, I assessed each theme determined in the current study in relation to the current literature.

Theme 1: Felt Connected to Mom

Out of the eight participants, seven shared that they felt a strong connection to their mother that spanned from childhood through adulthood. Several participants said their mothers play a very important role in their lives. Further, several participants recognized that their positive relationship with their mothers was likely due to their fathers' absence.

These participant experiences and perspectives slightly conflict with the previous literature. Multiple research studies concluded that children, especially young men, may be more likely to connect with their abusive fathers as opposed to their victimized mothers (Fong et al., 2017; Gagnon et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017). Victimized mothers are also known to show higher signs of stress, anxiety, and substance abuse (Fusco, 2017) that may influence child attachment. Yet, other studies have noted the ways negative impact may be mediated. For instance, research has shown that communication between a mother and child can reduce PTSD symptoms and positively influence attachment as the child is better able to comprehend the traumatic events and feel increased levels of security (Visser et al., 2016).

Therefore, participant experiences may be explained by the increased level of sensitivity their mothers showed them, which has been linked to more secure attachment (Suchman et al., 2018). This perspective also coincides with previous literature about whether children tend to view the abuse witnessed as a betrayal. Since none of the participants relied on their fathers (abusers) for support, they were more likely to view the abuse as betrayal (Gagnon et al., 2017) and less likely to form paternal attachment. Although a large amount of research exists to support the fact that young men who witness father-against-mother abuse may view the abuse as justified (Fong et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017), other research has shown that insecure paternal attachment may improve later life functioning because the child does not attempt to replicate, and in fact distances themselves, from the abuser (Callaghan et al., 2017). This appears to be the case in the current study as participants felt attached to their mothers and overwhelmingly

criticized the abuse exhibited by their fathers or father figures. Yet, the fact that each participant identified as an abuser speaks to some connection to, or replication of, their abusive father figures. I will discuss the potential reasons for this continued behavior in further detail throughout this chapter.

Theme 2: Felt They Fulfill a Masculine Role (With Mom and Present Relationship)

Despite a strong relationship with their mothers, each participant self-identified as having perpetrated some form of IPA. A few participants even recognized that they adopted their father's more traditional perspectives regarding masculinity. Children often assess an abuser's emotional responses to assess how the abuser is likely to treat them or others (Repacholi et al., 2016). Participants may have recognized the ways in which they related to the offender (father) through this close assessment. In addition to self-preservation, or that of their mothers, previous literature has addressed the influence of gender roles on IPA perpetration. Men may desire to maintain the societal norm of masculinity through their IPA perpetration (Callaghan et al., 2017), which may explain why these participants, despite their connection to their mothers, went on to perpetrate IPA. This response from participants may also align with the research previously discussed, which found that young men are more inclined to relate to their abusive fathers than victimized mothers (Fong et al., 2017; Gagnon et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017).

Several participants expressed the desire to be the caretaker or protector in their current romantic relationships. Some participants directly related that desire to their experience with their mother, where they felt guilt for not being able to protect her. Research supports this caretaker mentality among children who witness abuse, as some

children do not avoid the incidents of IPA but take on the role of caretaker in attempt to make the behavior stop (Louis & Johnson, 2017). In a study involving adult women who experienced abuse, 85% of the participants stated that their children only exhibited turbulent or aggressive behaviors toward the abusers and not them (Louis & Johnson, 2017).

Similar to the role of caretaker or protector, participants felt the need to be overly involved and present in their current partner's lives. While some participants viewed this as healthy attachment, regardless of whether the over-involvement was initiated by them or their partners, others recognized the behavior as "clingy" and stemming from a lack of trust in either how their partner would handle a situation or whether their partner was able to remain safe without their presence. Mistrust has been strongly linked to childhood trauma and IPA perpetration among men (LaMotte et al., 2016) as mistrust has been shown to be a symptom of anxious attachment and lead to increased fears of abandonment (Heylen et al., 2017; Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). This fear of abandonment may be perceived as a threat and relate to how a child translated witnessed IPA to their adult relationships, resulting in IPA perpetration (Massa et al., 2017). This perception is escalated in those with insecure, anxious attachment when anger and hostility (Massa et al., 2017) or jealousy (Wright, 2017) are also present.

Overall, gender norms may perpetuate the cycle of abuse, as men who accept gendered masculine roles tend to emphasize control, which is potentially an abusive trait (Callaghan et al, 2017). About half of the participants recognized their desire for control in their relationships and other perceived masculine traits, such as being the leader or

decision maker in the relationship, as an element of comfort. The male-female gender roles within the childhood home may explain why several of the male participants expressed perpetrating non-physical forms of abuse. Previous research has demonstrated that those who were raised in more equitable male/female homes perpetrated fewer incidents of physical IPA (Yount et al., 2016).

Theme 3: Emotions Regarding Impact on Relationships

Most of the participants emphatically believed that their childhood experience and witnessed abuse did not have a negative impact on their adult intimate partner relationships. For those who acknowledged impact, they stated such impact was either minimal or positive in nature. Despite these statements, further statements demonstrated actual negative impact as participants acknowledged that their childhood experience was generalized to their adult relationships, elements of their childhood experience remain, and that their adult relationships would have been more normal had they not witnessed IPA as a child. Some research supports the theory that children who witness abuse exhibit internalizing, as opposed to externalizing, behaviors (Zhou et al., 2017). Several participants exhibited internalized behaviors such as avoidance, guilt, and nervousness. These traits may have caused participants to view their relationship with their current intimate partner more favorably and therefore a decreased impact from their childhood experiences.

The inability to recognize the impact witnessed IPA has had on their current intimate partner relationships may provide further evidence of avoidant attachment. Previous research found that avoidant attachment correlated with satisfaction in

participant relationships, and not necessarily abuse, because those with avoidant attachment may avoid relationships or conflict in general (Godbout et al., 2017).

Another strong subtheme represented by the participants was that they thought they would be more violent had they directly experienced violence as a child. This perspective stemmed from the belief of several participants that they did not experience any form of abuse. In this way, participants associated abuse as physical, and did not associate witnessed IPA or verbal abuse as impactful. Seven of the eight participants did not view themselves as a victim of IPA as a childhood. While one participant felt more victimized, he associated that victimization with both parents for how his father behaved and how his mother responded to those situations by separating herself from her son.

Research has shown that those who are victimized by an offender they know well are more likely to be violent in the future (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Despite being victims of a well-known offender (their father-figures), the fact that participants did not view themselves as victims may further explain decreased levels of violent forms of IPA perpetration among participants. Previous research also provides several other rationales as to why participants felt they would be more violent had they witnessed more violence or been abused themselves as children. Research has shown that externalizing behaviors in children, such as violence with others, increased when those children witnessed IPA in the home and experienced corporal punishment (Fong et al., 2017). This was true for both perpetration of IPA and non-IPA forms of violence (Fowler et al., 2016; Godbout et al., 2017). Stronger maternal bonds may have also influenced violent tendencies, as increased maternal availability has been shown to buffer child socioemotional concerns (Fusco,

2017) and decrease PTSD symptoms in children (Boeckel et al., 2017). It should also be noted that participants may have minimized abuse severity, whether witnessed or experienced, as the abuse may have been common, and therefore downplayed by both parents (Boeckel et al., 2017). Therefore, despite the IPA witnessed by the participants as children, whether the participant viewed themself as a victim, experienced corporal punishment, or had a strong maternal bond may have all influenced the level or frequency of violence later perpetrated by the participant.

Theme 4: Felt Thankful for the Steps They Took to Cope

Several participants also spoke about the steps they took to address any potential influence witnessed IPA had on them. While one participant looked to peers for examples on how to treat women, another participant stated they sought counseling for their childhood experiences. Other participants strove to improve communication with their partners to better handle adverse situations in their relationship. Participants stated they go to their mothers for relationship advice, especially when communication with their partner is unsuccessful. Maternal advice may relate to general family advice, advice on how to handle difficult conversations, avoiding divorce, and how to refrain from being like their fathers.

This level of importance placed on communication seems to contradict previous research. Research indicates that children exposed to IPA are more likely to have socioemotional problems in terms of self-regulation, communication, interaction, autonomy, and several other factors (Fusco, 2017). Although the emotions of IPA perpetrators are controlled in the way that they are directed at a specific victim (Theobald

et al., 2016), unhealthy attachment is linked to decreased emotional regulation overall (Boeckel et al., 2017; Heylen et al., 2017; Wright, 2017). Anxious attachment creates relationship insecurity and a decreased ability to manage stress (Heylen et al., 2017). However, gaining control in the relationship alleviates that perceived threat of abandonment in males (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). So, while participants in this study self-reported fairly strong self-regulation by refraining from physical violence when desired, participants also acknowledged the inability to regulate their need to control the relationship despite a desire to refrain from such behavior. Participants placed increased importance on interactions, communication, and compromise with their partners. While these may also be forms of control, they may relate to their mother's self-esteem and identity that she transferred to the participants and therefore limited the impact of trauma. It is possible, then, that decreased trauma may have led to less physical forms of IPA perpetration among participants. Research supports this theory as maternal attachment, a mother's support from her social network, and overall family functioning were shown to mediate the relationship between witnessed violence and socioemotional problems in children (Fusco, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

This research study was guided by Bowlby's attachment theory. Attachment, specifically maternal attachment, was highly evident in this study as I asked participants to share their lived experiences regarding their relationships with their mothers after witnessing IPA as a child. Bowlby emphasized the importance of maternal attachment, since mothers provide all physiological, and therefore first essential, needs of the child

(Bowlby, 1958). Maternal attachment has been shown to be stronger and more consistent than with other caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). According to Bowlby (1969), attachment occurs when an infant recognizes their caregiver in a positive way and seeks proximity to them. Participants in this study expressed strong connections to their mothers, and shared that such a connection remained from childhood through adulthood.

As predicted by Bowlby and demonstrated in the literature, initial attachment to one's caregiver is linked to future attachment overall, especially in romantic constructs. In this way, further love and security needs are associated with the physiological needs first provided by their caregiver. The participants addressed these connections in several ways throughout the study. For example, participants spoke to their positive relationships with their mothers and how they associated their connection to their mother with their connection to their current intimate partner. While some participants did not feel there was a strong connection with their partners yet, they stated their goal was to have their relationship with their partner be as secure and comfortable as it is with their mother.

Although the participants stated they felt connected to their mothers, and implied secure attachment, their later statements spoke to insecure (anxious or avoidant) forms of attachment. Participants seemed to heavily rely on their mothers for current support and advice in their current relationships. Statements regarding controlling behavior, the need to care for or protect their mothers and partners, and the need to be close to or in frequent communication with their partners may speak to relationship insecurity as participants may have perceived that without that level of control or involvement an abandonment threat exists. Some participants did associate this feeling to their childhood experience by

stating they would likely be more trusting of their partners had they not witnessed IPA. So, while participants noted strong maternal bonds that would typically lead to secure attachment, the impact statements regarding witnessed IPA seemed to produce anxious and avoidant attachment styles and were therefore aligned with the previous literature involving factors that may influence healthy maternal attachment.

Participants also associated closeness, whether in physical proximity or communication, to their partners as an essential and pivotal part of their relationship. Their viewpoints stemmed from their relationships with their mothers in which proximity and frequent communication was the norm. These views manifested to the point where even planned separation from a partner was viewed as a threat to relationship security and fostered mistrust. Participants even stated they felt guilty for not being able to protect their mother when they were a child and therefore wanted to ensure they were able to protect their partners. Therefore, levels of maternal attachment were present and even intentionally mimicked by participants in their current intimate partner relationships.

In addition to attachment theory, elements of social learning theory were also evident in this study. Many participants felt that they had to maintain a masculine role or stereotype. While it may be possible that such a perception is based in other theories, social learning theory is the theory most associated with negative or criminal behaviors and proposes that children imitate adult behaviors after observation (Bandura, 1961). It is possible that the participants observed the masculine roles exhibited by their fathers and adopted such beliefs or practices.

While participants stated they tried to refrain from being as abusive as their fathers or male caregivers, many acknowledged that they maintained some of their male father-figure's traits or even a desire to hold the level of control exhibited when they were children. Some participants even sought guidance from peers regarding their relationships. One participant stated they learned from their peers how to appreciate women and others stated they listened to their peers that lying, or infidelity would be acceptable in their circumstance. Thus, social learning theory remains an important construct in IPA perpetration. This is due to the increased likelihood that societal norms and viewed behaviors of others often influence our own behaviors in some capacity. Although research strongly supports this likelihood in child development, the same can be said for adults through learned behaviors, whether positive or negative.

Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations exist in all forms of research, and thus was the case in this study. Some limitations directly relate to the qualitative nature of the study, since an interpretative phenomenological study will always involve the subjective perspectives of the participants (Smith et al., 2012). The perspectives and interpretations of each participant were a limitation to this study as they may have influenced the trustworthiness of the information provided to the researcher. Trustworthiness of the information is very important to any research study to ensure reliability, validity, and to facilitate future replications of the study. However, since this was a phenomenological study, more value was placed on capturing the perceived lived experience of the participants, as opposed to

focusing on collecting factual information related to their childhood and current intimate partner experiences.

While I took steps to increase trustworthiness through assessment of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, as suggested in previous research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the fact that a researcher plays a significant role in the interpretation of data cannot be denied. In this study, I took steps to remain neutral while gathering and processing data. For example, I asked participants several times to elaborate on information and mirrored language to ensure the statements and interpretations were taken directly from each participant. While I have previous experience working with victims of crime, I also have more recent and relevant experience interviewing victims, offenders, and witnesses, and appropriately weighing that information in a neutral manner solely based on the evidence. It is possible, though, that another researcher with different life or educational experiences may analyze the same set of data differently and produce varied themes.

There are specific examples of participant responses that may call trustworthiness of the information presented into question. The overwhelming majority of participants stated that they felt witnessed IPA as a child had little to no impact on their adult romantic relationships. For those whose who acknowledged impact, they stated the impact was positive in nature. Despite this, the same participants made several further statements that directly spoke to negative impact, such as the witnessed IPA is still a part of them, that they would have been worse had their situation been worse, and the steps they took to cope with their childhood experiences. Therefore, participant perspectives

played a very strong role in this study. Given other statements from the participants, it is possible that because they witnessed physical abuse and largely perpetrated non-physical forms of IPA, most participants perceived their experiences to not have affected them. In tandem, participants likely perceived that their childhood experiences had a positive impact on them and their relationships because the experience resulted in a significant connection to their mother. The combination of these statements made it even more critical for me to remain unbiased and assess the totality of the statements provided by each participant.

Similarly, self-selection bias may have led to the types of participants and responses available. Self-selection bias occurs when participants completely decide on their own whether to participate in a study (Lavrakas, 2008). I requested that participants self-identify as having perpetrated IPA, and therefore may have influenced the results by capturing a certain subgroup of the population that are more inclined to identify themselves as less-violent abusers. Non-violent forms of abuse may be less embarrassing to talk about than other forms. In turn, the true population may not be adequately represented in this study results. Participants needed a level of abuse understanding in order to self-identify. However, those same participants may be less inclined to speak truthfully about abuse severity, whether witnessed or perpetrated, and still practice self-preservation. The limitation to this study is notable even though thus is the case in almost every research study, the limitation to this study is notable.

Any incentive to participate in a research study can produce other unintended study limitations. I relied on participants sharing this study with others. The incentive to

participate may have assisted in the likelihood that the study was shared with others. As a natural part of snowball sampling, participants share the study with those they know or who are close to them. Therefore, although not a direct goal in qualitative studies, this sampling strategy may have also influenced the type of participants who came forward, as participants were likely to share the recruitment information with those who have similar interests, cultures, and experiences. People are naturally drawn to those whom they share commonalities with, whether in childhood experiences, personality, or current socioeconomic status. This appeared possible in this study as some participants told the researcher that they shared the study with their friends or heard about the study from a friend.

Another potential limitation to this study that is common to all studies is the length of participant interviews and the willingness of participants to articulate or share their experiences. While surely not the case for all, some participants seemed to find it challenging to speak to their experiences and often provided one-word responses. In those situations, I further prompted the participant to elaborate or help me understand their experience. I was often able to gather additional, detailed information by using this strategy. Nonetheless, some participants were naturally more willing to share details about their experiences and therefore had longer interviews than others. These differences in interview times may have limited the breadth and depth of phenomenological information provided to me and therefore data overall.

Recommendations

Even with the contributions this study has made to the subject area, research involving the lived experiences of men who witnessed IPA as a child and perpetrated IPA as an adult remains limited. I identified areas for further research as a result of this study which may further guide the connection between witnessed IPA and IPA perpetration among men. Further exploration into the perspectives of men who meet the criteria will be beneficial to the field overall given the potential study limitation regarding participant subjectivity.

For example, the fact that several participants did not recognize themselves as victims because they did not experience physical abuse as a child calls for the need to consider the definition of abuse used by men in this category. Although the participants in this study recognized other forms of IPA by self-identifying as abusers despite not necessarily being physically violent with their current partner, how participants define IPA, in combination with their lived experiences, would assist in the knowledge of IPA perpetration. Those who have a strong understanding of the varying forms of abuse may have acknowledged more impact from their childhood experiences by recognizing the ways in which the experience influenced controlling or verbally abusive behaviors. The perspective of the participants' partner regarding controlling or verbally abusive behavior would also be another potential area of further research. While participants self-identified as having perpetrated IPA, the level of that IPA was not necessarily requested and may have been downplayed by the participants. What a participant described as care and concern may be described as controlling abuse by the partner.

Participant views on masculinity and the influence masculinity had on their current intimate partner relationships after witnessed IPA are another perspective that would be beneficial to explore. Several participants felt that they portrayed masculine roles and attempted to be "the man" in the relationship. Some participants associated this perspective with their father or male caregiver's ideals or behaviors. One participant noted that this belief was traditional in their culture. Further research into this variable would be beneficial to the field to determine whether definitions or views of masculinity impact IPA perpetration after witnessed abuse and perhaps the type of abuse. While some participants seek a masculine view of control to mitigate their perceived threat to security, other participants may seek that level of control as part of their masculine construct and desire to maintain power in the relationship.

Multiple participants also stated that they felt connected to their mother and continue to go to their mother as a source of wisdom and advice. It is important to understand, then, their mother's definition of a healthy relationship. Previous research has shown similar characteristics among victims of IPA, which may include childhood trauma, self-esteem, and views of family and support. Therefore, further research regarding how victimized mothers define a healthy relationship would be beneficial to the field given that those perspectives are translated to the child through action and advice. A mother's potentially unhealthy views regarding relationships may be encouraged in their children and therefore perpetuate further abuse. One participant stated that after walking in on his wife having an affair, he wished to divorce his wife because that only furthered mistrust. Yet, his mother discouraged him from divorce implying that if she

could remain with his father after such abuse that he could fix his relationship with his wife. While there was not enough information to determine whether this was healthy advice, research regarding maternal definitions of healthy relationships when providing advice to adult male IPA perpetrators who identified a strong connection to their mother would truly benefit the field overall.

Similarly, several participants compared their relationship with their mother to that with their intimate partner. Some participants even sought to replicate that relationship and sought characteristics in their partner that their mother possessed. One should consider, then, whether these maternal relationships described were healthy or secure, as participants may have had a peer, as opposed to parental, relationship with their mothers. Further research to explore how adult men who witnessed IPA as a child view their relationship with their mother in comparison to peers would be beneficial to the field.

Implications

I was able to determine implications for social change based on the study results. Most of the participants felt very connected to their mothers during the witnessed IPA in childhood and into adulthood. Many participants view their mothers as a “hero” and “guru” that they can go to advice about their current relationship or source of support. Participants stated that they often felt more comfortable with their mothers than their current partners and would go to their mother when they felt communication with their partner was not productive. Although most of the participants stated they felt connected to their mothers, whether that attachment was secure is in doubt. Attachment counseling

would be beneficial to all children who witness IPA as a child, to ensure attachment bonds are appropriately formed.

While the men in this study felt little negative impact to their current relationships, their later statements regarding control, masculine stereotypes, and an over-reliance on their mothers for support may speak to the need for more secure attachment to both mom and current partners. Without attachment therapy, insecure forms of attachment, such as anxious or avoidant, may continue in young men who witnessed IPA and therefore make them more prone to perpetration. Society would benefit from increased funds to support such attachment therapy for children who witness IPA.

Healthy attachment may reduce the cycle of IPA among men who witnessed abuse. This would be accomplished through psychosocial and cognitive interpretations of their lived childhood experiences. Society has a long way to go in this area, as men are often solely viewed as the perpetrators and therefore part of the problem, as opposed to the solution. Although previous literature has widely substantiated the fact that men who perpetrate IPA are often victims of IPA or other forms of abuse themselves, little focus is placed on young men who witness IPA and what steps may be taken to mitigate risk of future abuse. A trauma-informed approach to the lived experiences of these young men would identify them as victims and therefore open the door to increased funds for research and support. This study emphasized the need for this societal support and further research because while attachment was existent, perceived attachment may be just as detrimental to future abuse if that attachment not formed securely. Increased societal resources would also lessen the need for these young men to rely on their mothers as the

sole form of support in their lives, further increasing healthy attachment in other relationships.

Conclusion

In this study, I evaluated the previous literature surrounding witnessed IPA in childhood, maternal attachment, and adult male IPA perpetration. My goal was to expand current knowledge on the influence of maternal attachment through assessment of the lived experiences of men who have witnessed IPA as a child and later perpetrated IPA as an adult. I used an interpretative phenomenological approach aimed to understand maternal attachment perceptions of the eight, adult male participants. I established four themes from the two research questions posed. The four themes included: felt connected to mom, feel they fulfill a masculine role (with mom & present relationship), feelings regarding impact on relationships, and feeling thankful for the steps they took to cope.

Study results and the four themes presented can be used to further research exploring the influence witnessed IPA and maternal attachment has on later IPA perpetration. Multiple participants felt connected to their mothers despite the abuse witnessed as a child and felt that the witnessed abuse had a very limited negative impact on their current intimate partner relationships. Several participants made statements that spoke to insecure forms of attachment and an increased reliance on their mother's continued support into adulthood as opposed to forming an equally strong relationship with their current intimate partner. Participants also spoke to the fulfillment of masculine gender roles in the forms of controlling behavior, caretaker roles, and need to be near their partners. Participants also stated they took steps to cope with their lived experiences

as a child and felt they would be more violent had they not formed a strong connection to their mother, experienced physical abuse directly, or taken the necessary steps to improve their relationships. Further research into definitions of abuse, masculinity, and healthy relationships may continue to shed light on the best way to serve this population.

Society can play a part by beginning to treat young men who witness IPA as the victims they are as opposed to preemptively regarding them as future offenders. Attachment therapy may better serve this population as secure forms of maternal attachment have been shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD, create healthier socioemotional outcomes, and translate to later adult romantic relationships. While any form of attachment may have mitigated the level of physical abuse perpetrated by participants, the development of truly secure attachment may be a productive way to mitigate the cycle of IPA overall and therefore reduce further harm to both victims and offenders.

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Appendix A: Flyer

Male volunteers needed for research study

This study is **COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS**
Receive a **$25 AMAZON GIFT CARD** for your participation!

1. Are you a man 18 years or older?
2. Did your mother's partner argue or even get physical with your mother when you were a child?
3. Do you sometimes have struggles in your relationships?
4. Are you able to take part in an interview?

(Nasir, 2019)

If you answered yes to all these questions, you may be able to help me understand the influence witnessing violence toward a mother has on a young boy.
If you would like to participate, please call or text [Researcher Phone Number]

Appendix B: Interview Script

Interview Questions

1. Hi. How are you today?

2. Tell me more about yourself.

    - How old are you?

    - Are you currently married or in a relationship?

I'm aware you witnessed your mom being a victim of IPA. I understand this must have been hard for you, and we're not here to talk about that. I'm very much interested in how you think that experience influenced your relationship with your girlfriend/wife.
To learn more about that, I am speaking with individuals who have had struggles in their relationships. This includes arguments, control, or perhaps threats or violence. I will not be asking you about those things, just whether they occurred.

3. Would you, or someone else, say that you have been controlling, threatening, or even violent in a relationship?

4. Could you please describe your relationship with your girlfriend/wife?

    - What does 'trust' in a relationship mean to you?

        - How would you describe trust between you and your girlfriend/wife?

        - How you think trust in your relationship was influenced by your experience with your mom?

    - What does 'comfort' in a relationship mean to you?

-How would you describe your level of comfort with your girlfriend/wife?

-How do you think your experience with your mom influenced your comfort level with your girlfriend/wife?

- What does 'support' in a relationship mean to you?

-How would you describe your girlfriend/wife's support of you?

- How do you think your views of support were influenced by your experience with your mom?

- How do you feel when you are away from your girlfriend/wife?

- How do you think your experience with your mom influences how you feel when away from your girlfriend/wife?

5. What similarities do you see between your relationship with your mom and girlfriend/wife?

- What differences do you see between your relationship with your mom and you girlfriend/wife?

- How do you think a different experience with your mom would affect your relationship now?

6. What would your ideal relationship with your girlfriend/wife look like?

- What are the reasons you would want the relationship to be like this?

- How easy/difficult do you think your experience with your mom makes it for your relationship to be like this?

7. What do you think is preventing your from having a better relationship with your girlfriend/wife?

- How do you think your experience with your mom influenced this?

- Tell me about things that could have been done to make your relationship with your girlfriend/wife stronger?

8. How do you think your experience with your mom influenced your relationship with your girlfriend/wife?

- How would your girlfriends say your experience with your mom influenced your relationship with them?

-How do you think your experience with your mom influenced your relationships with previous girlfriends?

- How do you think your experience with your mom influenced your relationship with girlfriends/partners as an adult overall?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Please feel free to share this study with others who may be interested. (Additional information will be emailed to you at the email address you provided.)