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A Phenomenological Examination of Heterosexual Men Who Experience Psychological Abuse

Raymond Carson
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Raymond Carson

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Abstract

A Phenomenological Examination of Heterosexual Men Who Experience Psychological

Abuse

by

Raymond Carson

MSW, Fayetteville State University, 2008

BS, Saint Leo University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

Although sexual and physical abuse have clear definitions, psychological abuse is difficult to define and conceptualize. Though men can and have experienced psychological abuse, there is limited research on heterosexual men's experiences with psychological abuse and much of the research on abuse has been on women. Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological study, grounded on control theory, the social choice framework, and narrative theory, was conducted to investigate how heterosexual men describe their experiences with psychological abuse. A phenomenological qualitative approach with purposeful sampling was used to draw a sample of heterosexual male participants ($N = 6$), ages 30 to 42 were interviewed, and transcripts were created from their responses for content analysis. The data was analyzed and coded to identify categories and themes. The results of this study indicated that heterosexual men do experience psychological abuse and they define this phenomenon with the underlying behavior of manipulation where physical abuse may or may not be prevalent. This research may also provide behavior health practitioners an opportunity to develop treatment strategies that address heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This research may also provide understanding to policy, lawmakers and law enforcement into understanding the lived experiences of heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This research has the potential for social change by adjusting both perspective and clinical definition as it pertains to heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For my wife Anissa, my children Sydney, Amara, Kenneth and Tyler I am truly appreciative for your support and love. To my mentors who have educated me in art of writing, knowledge and being a scholarly practitioner, thank you.

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Finally, I would like to thank all of the heterosexual male participants. I acknowledge it was your great strength and fortitude that allowed you to tell your story. You have provided a voice not only to yourselves but hopefully for others to describe their experiences as well. This study would not have been possible without the truth, candidness, and vulnerability you shared with me.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Control Theory.....	5
Social Exchange and Choice Framework.....	6
Narrative Theory.....	6
Nature of the Study.....	7
Operational Definitions.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Scope and Delimitations.....	8
Limitations.....	8
Significance.....	9
Social Change.....	9
Summary.....	10
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	11
Introduction.....	11

Literature Search Strategy.....	12
Theoretical Framework.....	13
Control Theory.....	13
Social Exchange and Choice Framework	14
Narrative Theory.....	14
Combining Theories.....	16
Literature Review.....	17
History of Psychological Abuse.....	18
Difficulty with Research on Psychological Abuse	19
Importance of Research on Psychological Abuse.....	21
Women and Psychological Abuse	23
Same-Sex Men and Psychological Abuse.....	25
Men and Psychological Abuse.....	26
Summary	28
Chapter 3: Research Methods	30
Purpose of the Study	30
Role of the Researcher	30
Research Methodology	31
Research Design.....	31
Participants of the Study	33
Demographics	33
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	34

Measures	34
Research Questions.....	35
Ethical Protection of Participants.....	35
Risk and Benefits of Participants	36
Procedures.....	36
Data Collection	37
Data Analysis	38
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	39
The Institutional Review Board at Walden University.....	40
Verification of Findings	41
Summary	42
Chapter 4: Results.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Research Setting.....	44
Demographics	45
Participant Profiles.....	47
Data Collection and Storage	49
Data Analysis	50
Code 1: Manipulation	51
Code 2: Intimidation	51
Code 3: Loss of Respect	52
Code 4: Physical Tactics.....	52

Code 5: Low self-esteem/Loss of will	53
Code 6: Threats of harm	53
Code 7: Threats of withholding sex	54
Data Verification.....	54
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	55
Credibility	55
Transferability.....	56
Dependability	56
Conformability.....	57
Results.....	58
Research Question 1	58
Research Question 2	61
Research Question 3	65
Summary.....	68
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	70
Introduction.....	70
Interpretation of Findings	70
Experiences with Psychological Abuse	71
Defining and Conceptualizing Psychological Abuse.....	73
Different Types of Psychological Abuse	76
Discussion of Theories.....	77
Limitations of the Study.....	78

Recommendations.....	79
Implications for Social Change.....	81
Conclusions.....	81
References.....	83
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	103

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Participants..... 46

Table 2. Most Common Behaviors Demonstrated by Participants' Female Significant
Other 61

Table 3. Types of Abuse Themes 66

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Psychological abuse is difficult to define and conceptualize (Comecanha, Bastro-Percira, & Maia, 2017; McHugh, Rakowski & Swiderski, 2013), but research has revealed that men can experience psychological abuse (McHugh, Rakowski & Swiderski, 2013; Randle & Graham, 2011). Psychological abuse is one of the three forms of intimate partner violence; the other two forms are physical and sexual abuse. Despite men experiencing psychological abuse, there is no evidence of what this looks like for heterosexual men and how they experience it. This chapter includes the history of psychological abuse, issues surrounding this phenomenon, reasons why it is important to research, theories that apply to this study, and how this study can lead to social change.

Background

There is no consensus on how psychological abuse is defined and conceptualized (Lawrence, Orengo-Aguayo, Langer, & Brock, 2012; O'Leary, 2001; Tolman, 1999) and what qualifies as psychological abuse (McHugh, Rakowski, & Swiderski, 2013). However, research has suggested that psychological abuse initiates with subtle behavior and progressively becomes more recurrent and intense controlling behavior (Lawrence et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is evidence that psychological abuse is a societal issue for both men and women. Research has shown that psychological abuse leads to 55% of women desiring a divorce and nearly 25% of men (Avant, Swopes, Davis & Dlhai, 2011).

One of the issues with conceptualizing psychological abuse is that the frequency of psychological abuse varies based on the research. Research that included various

forms of psychological abuse (i.e., mild and severe) were only viewed as one incident as evidence of abuse, and these forms of psychological abuse were not compared (Jezl et al., 1996; McHugh et al., 2013). Another study showed that 79% of men and women reported experiencing at least one incident of psychological abuse (Avant et al., 2011).

Additionally, in a recent U.S. study and analysis of psychological abuse among young adults, this phenomenon has shown to have the highest rates of perpetration and victimization, ranging between 70% and 80% (Comecanha et al., 2017). Further, nearly 90% of adults in intimate partner relationships report experiencing some form of psychological abuse (Jezl et al., 1996; McHugh et al., 2013). The frequency of psychological abuse experienced by U.S. college students ranges between 50% and 75% (McHugh et al., 2013; Neufeld et al. 1999; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989).

Based on this research, psychological abuse is a societal issue and not uncommon in intimate relationships. Though psychological abuse may not seem as significant as physical abuse due to the lack of visible evidence of maltreatment, research identifies that psychological abuse is the most common form of maltreatment. Research has also shown that individuals who experience psychological abuse can incur similar or greater consequences than that of physical abuse (Follingstad, Rutlege, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990). Research has also suggested that psychological abuse can result in greater consequences than physical abuse because it leaves invisible marks (Manso, Alonso, Sanchez, & Barona, 2011).

Psychological abuse is a lived experience that requires an analysis from a cultural context. Society's perception of gender has established the significance of intimate

partner violence (IPV) that is both psychological and physical (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Dutton & White, 2013). Psychological and physical IPV are more likely to be considered abusive by the public when men are committing the action. Research has indicated that this is true across ethnicities that classify behaviors as psychological and physical abuse (Dutton & White, 2013; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). This study was focused on how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse describe this phenomenon.

Problem Statement

Intimate partner violence (IPV) can be defined as physical or psychological tactics directed toward romantic partners (Shortt, Capaldi, Kim, & Tiberio, 2012). Psychological abuse is one of the three forms of IPV; the other two are physical and sexual abuse. Significant research has been conducted on physical and sexual abuse (Follingstad & Rogers, 2013) with less conclusive research on psychological abuse (Comecanha et al., 2017). Research has defined psychological abuse as emotional where name-calling and isolation occurs (Comecanha et al., 2017), a series of insults and ridiculing an individual both in private and public to the degree the individual experiences psychological trauma (Alonso, Mans, & Sanchez, 2012), a demonstration of control and power resulting in damaging the victim's self-worth (William, Richardson, Hammock & Janit, 2012), and a series of verbal and behavior acts intended to demean a significant other (Shorey et al., 2012). Psychological abuse for this study is defined as verbal or physical behavior, subtle or severe acts, that affect the cognitive and emotional state of the individual in an adverse manner (Hines & Douglas, 2011).

Psychological abuse is multifaceted, and there are no studies that have highlighted heterosexual men and their perspective of this phenomenon (Hall, 2014; McHugh et al., 2013). Without the heterosexual male lived experience of psychological abuse, definitions or conceptualizations of this phenomenon are insufficient (Comecanha et al., 2017). Female and child victimization has been the emphasis in research as it pertains to psychological abuse, which has resulted in a lesser understanding of this phenomenon from the heterosexual male victim's perspective (McHugh et al., 2013; Randle & Graham, 2011). This is significant because psychological abuse is the most severe form of abuse (Josolyn, 2011; Randle & Graham, 2011; Witte, Hackman, Boleigh & Mugoya, 2015). Therefore, this study addressed a significant gap in literature regarding heterosexual men's experience with psychological abuse. Examining the lived experiences of heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse is necessary to gain a full understanding of what psychological abuse is and means for heterosexual men experiencing it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it. A secondary objective of this study was to understand whether there are perceived levels of psychological abuse and whether heterosexual men describe differences between subtle and severe psychological abuse. This was accomplished using open-ended interview questions to gain a deeper understanding of how heterosexual men view psychological abuse. Open-ended questions helped explore the mindset, the feelings, and the

experiences of heterosexual men. The objective was to identify how psychological abuse is described among heterosexual men who have been victimized by their aggressive female significant other. The method for investigation and specific interview questions will be provided in Chapter 3 and Appendix A.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse describe their experiences?

Research Question 2: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it?

Research Question 3: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse distinguish the differences between subtle and severe psychological abuse?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study included control theory, the social exchange and choice framework, and narrative theory. Chapter 2 includes more of a discussion of theories and their influence on current research.

Control Theory

Control theory is derived from an individual's desire for power and control in a relationship. The underlying reason for perpetrators' behavior is to exert their authority over others. Behavior such as threats, use of force, or physical aggression by the perpetrator is demonstrated to control the behavior of the victim. Additionally, the perpetrator works toward gaining control over how the victim thinks and feels. Behavior

such as intimidation, coercion, isolation, economic abuse and denial of personal blame are demonstrated to maintain a psychological advantage. Victims in these relationships adapt to the various forms of intimidation and any attempts to challenge the perpetrator appear to be overwhelming. Control theory not only explains why perpetrators are violent, but it explains why victims are not violent (Fife & Schragger, 2012).

Social Exchange and Choice Framework

The social exchange and choice framework explains how individuals rationalize their self-interests by analyzing risks and rewards. Their behavior can be better understood and predicted by understanding their vested interests or values. Satisfaction alone does not determine whether an individual remains in a relationship. For example, society stigmatizes male victims who report experiencing psychological abuse, and men who experience psychological abuse may not consider themselves as victims because the rewards may outweigh the risks. For example, companionship and access to sex may outweigh the conflict that is experienced but not considered psychological abuse (Karakurt & Silver, 2013).

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is focused on victims and how they place significance on their issues (Hall, 2014). Narratives are framed as stories that reveal characteristics of individuals in the context of their history and possible future, and there are self-narratives that isolate moments in life (Hall & Powell, 2011). How people explain stories about their lives influences the way they understand their identities (Hall, 2014). There are also trauma narratives that can be recent or previous events. Individuals who experience

psychological abuse experience this phenomenon in the form of psychological trauma (Hall & Powell, 2011). Narrative theory explains how history of psychological abuse can influence a victim's self-communication, belief system, and definition of psychological abuse (Hall, 2014).

Nature of the Study

I employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to research the phenomenon of heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse by their aggressive female significant other. I explored the lives of heterosexual men who are in relationships with aggressive female partners and who have experienced psychological abuse. By developing a deeper understanding of their unique experiences, it allowed me to better understand how heterosexual male victims define and conceptualize psychological abuse and describe this phenomenon. Phenomenology is an approach used in qualitative studies and can be defined as a frame of thought where the focus is an individual's unique perceptions and experiences in the real world (Marshall, Kitson & Zietz, 2012).

Operational Definitions

Heterosexual men: These men are acknowledging themselves as individuals who are in relationships with women only.

Psychological abuse: defined as verbal or physical behavior, subtle or severe acts that affect the cognitive and emotional state of the individual in an adverse manner.

Assumptions

One of the assumptions was that participants answered openly and honestly to the questions presented. Heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse were

assumed to desire to have their voice heard. A second assumption was that the inclusion criteria was appropriate and assured that heterosexual men who participate in this study would have experienced the related phenomenon.

Scope and Delimitations

One delimitation is that no women or homosexual men participated in this study. The results of this study can only be generalized to heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse. A second delimitation is the geographic region where results of this study can be generalized, which is the state of Texas. Other heterosexual men in other parts of the United States may view psychological abuse much differently. Results of this study may not be generalized to other heterosexual men who have been victimized due to the unique nature of this study.

Limitations

One limitation was having access to heterosexual men who experienced psychological abuse. Identifying heterosexual male victims needed to be coordinated through network channels (i.e., treatment facilities) that service this demographic. Treatment facilities may have limited access to their male participants to prevent further stigma. A third limitation is that this study was limited to heterosexual men. However, this was purposeful because research has not been focused on psychological abuse from the heterosexual male's live experience. Additionally, there was not an opportunity in this study to compare the effects of psychological abuse between men and women.

Significance

This research addresses the gap in literature regarding how heterosexual men describe and experience psychological abuse. The results from studying this phenomenon in a qualitative way provide a greater understanding that can provide awareness to laws, guidelines, and programs that address psychological abuse. Recommendations can possibly be offered to organizations such as social services and the judicial system that have not been able to address male victims, as many men have been turned away (Hines & Douglas, 2011).

Society's focus on victimization of women has resulted in limited services offered for male victims of psychological abuse (Hines & Douglas, 2011). Traditionally, men have been taught to handle their issues privately, especially when it involves female aggressive partners (Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford & Fiebert, 2012a, 2012b). This research may assist men to handle their issues such as psychological abuse more openly. By providing a definitive perspective on how psychological abuse is defined and conceptualized for heterosexual men, this study can improve interventions to help men who experience this type of abuse.

Social Change

Social change involves using collective resources with other individuals who share a similar vision for social change and can influence their environment in a positive manner. This study can lead to positive social change by encouraging others to establish focus groups for male victims and work toward understanding how women use psychological tactics toward them (Randle & Graham, 2011; Simonelli & Ingram, 1998).

Additionally, this study's results can be used to develop a framework of male victims who have experienced IPV that can be presented to educators, government officials, and clinical practitioners. This model can be used to identify the stigmas and challenges these men have experienced (Hines & Douglas, 2011). Eventually, this would work in altering domestic violence agencies and treatment programs by making them gender-inclusive. The results from studying this phenomenon in a qualitative way provides a greater understanding that can lead to recommendations to address psychological abuse toward heterosexual men such as interventions.

Summary

This chapter provided the main points of the study with the emphasis on lack of definition and conceptualization for heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This study is grounded in control theory, the social exchange and choice framework, and narrative theory, which guided the analysis to determine how heterosexual men define and conceptualize psychological abuse. A thorough review of the current literature on psychological abuse revealed a lack of focus on the effects of psychological abuse on heterosexual men.

In this chapter I provided an overview of my study. Chapter 2 outlines the review of the literature with both current and historical research of the phenomenon of interest. Chapter 3 follows with a description of the study design; participants, procedures, assessments; and how data were assessed.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it. Psychological abuse is one of the three forms of IPV, with the other two being sexual and physical. Research has various definitions and conceptualizations of psychological abuse, but there are none for heterosexual men (Comecanha et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2013). Although there is research on psychological abuse, a significant amount has not been focused on heterosexual male victims who experience it (McHugh et al., 2013), which has resulted in a barrier when studying male victims of psychological abuse (Hall, 2014).

Although research often emphasizes women victims, it is important to recognize and explore how heterosexual male victims are affected. Emphasis on female victimization leads to less understanding of this phenomenon from the heterosexual male victim's perspective (Randle & Graham, 2011). But research reveals that heterosexual men are more likely to experience psychological abuse as opposed to physical abuse by their aggressive female significant other (McHugh et al., 2013; Randle & Graham, 2011). Additionally, research has found that psychological abuse results in significant and often greater consequences for the victim (Hall, 2014; McHugh et al., 2013; Randle & Graham, 2011).

Reviewing the literature helped to identify and understand how heterosexual men define and conceptualize psychological abuse. The theoretical framework for this study includes control theory, based on power and control in a relationship; social exchange

and choice framework, based on analyzing risks and rewards and how individuals rationalize their interests; and narrative theory, based on the individual and how the individual places significance on their issues. This chapter includes an examination of the literature on the phenomenon in question. It also includes initial research on psychological abuse in adult relationships, various findings and results on what psychological abuse entails, and difficulty with defining and conceptualizing psychological abuse.

Literature Search Strategy

The methodology used to find and produce relevant recent information included primary, secondary, and tertiary searches using keyword combinations: *psychological abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, psychological trauma and psychological distress, maltreatment of women, intimate partner violence, and psychological abusive behaviors, intimate partner psychological violence, depression, anxiety disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, violence in couples, domestic violence, psychological intimate partner violence, gender symmetry, intimate partner measurement of IPV, intimate partner aggression, psychological aggression, perceptions of aggression, perceptions of domestic violence, dating violence, consequences, perpetration, male victims, violence against men, partner violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, common couple violence, and male violence and gender harassment*. The databases were from Walden University, USA MEDDAC Medical Library, and Fayetteville State University. Databases included Academic Search Complete, PubMed, ProQuest Central, and individual databases including PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and Psychology: SAGE.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study includes control theory, the social exchange and choice framework, and narrative theory (see Fife & Schrager, 2012; Karakurt & Silver, 2013). These theories provided rationalizations of ideas that have a bearing on this research. They also provided understanding on how heterosexual men describe and view psychological abuse.

Control Theory

Control theory explains an individual's desire for power and control in a relationship, which motivates a perpetrator's behavior toward a vulnerable significant other (Bates, Graham-Kevan, & Archer, 2014). The more authoritative and controlling individual in the relationship relies on threats, aggression, or the threats to use aggression to attain compliance from the vulnerable significant other. These behaviors are intended to restrict the significant other from engaging in behavior that does not please the authoritative controlling individual (Fife & Schrager, 2012). Additionally, the perpetrator works toward gaining control over how the victim thinks and feels. Behaviors such as intimidation, coercion, isolation, economic abuse, and denial of personal blame are demonstrated to maintain a psychological advantage. Victims in these relationships adapt to the various forms of intimidation and may find it overwhelming to challenge them. Thus, control theory not only explains why perpetrators are violent, but it explains why victims are not violent (Fife & Schrager, 2012).

Social Exchange and Choice Framework

The social exchange and choice framework explains how individuals rationalize their self-interests by analyzing risks and rewards. Individuals' behavior can be better understood and predicted by understanding their interests and values (White & Klein, 2002). For instance, men who experience psychological abuse may not consider themselves as victims because the rewards may outweigh the risks. For example, companionship and access to sex may outweigh the conflict that is experienced but not considered psychological abuse (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Additionally, there is a risk of stigma against male victims who report experiencing psychological abuse.

There is a sequence of power and decision-making that occurs in intimate partner relationships. The more power a person has in the relationship indicates more independence (Huston, 1983; McDonald, 1981). There is also a correlation between resources and dependence. The individual who is least vested in the relationship may have the most power because they are less dependent on the relationship. Furthermore, the individual who has access to greater resources tends to be the one with greater power and have greater control over the outcomes available to their partner. The comparative degrees of involvement, dependence, and resources contribute to the various patterns of interaction perceived in intimate partner relationships (Karakurt & Silver, 2013).

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is focused on how individuals place significance on their issues. It is used to describe individuals who are in a continuous process of numerous storylines and various implications, as compared to a collection of facts and one absolute truth

(Hall, 2014). Stories expose characteristics of the individual in the context of their history and possible future, and development is understood through narratives (Hall & Powell, 2011).

A self-narrative can be an isolated moment, or it can be an extended perspective of an individual's life, explained chronologically from the earliest memory to the present (Hall & Powell, 2011). How people describe stories about their lives influences the way they understand their identities. The stories that people speak about determine how they attribute meaning to their experiences and how these experiences that are manifested, as these stories shape an individual's life (White & Epston, 1990). The lives and relationships of these individuals develop as they experience these stories (Hall, 2014).

Individuals who experience psychological abuse experience a form of psychological trauma. It is important to recognize that trauma narratives can be recent or past events. For example, flashbacks, or reliving the incident in a person's mind, are the most common of trauma narratives and are usually of recent events. When investigating interpersonal trauma, it is better to ask questions like "What do you recall experiencing when you were in that relationship? How difficult was it for you at that time?" This was found to be useful in narrative studies of thriving after abuse (Hall & Powell, 2011).

One of the advantages of a narrative theory is that it enables individuals to compartmentalize facets of their personality. When victims of psychological abuse can compartmentalize their experiences, it changes their perspective and has implications for overcoming their traumatic experiences. Victims who have allowed themselves to be defined by their trauma creates a framework where they see themselves as the perpetual

victim (Avant et al., 2011). Stories can be focused on overcoming psychological abuse as opposed to succumbing to it; the victim is then empowered for change (Hall, 2014).

Narrative theory also explains how victims' history of psychological abuse can influence the way they communicate with themselves and others. Individuals' experiences as victims of psychological abuse influence how they self-communicate when faced with new challenges and dilemmas. Victims who experience psychological abuse may or may not define it the same way even if their experiences had a significant influence on their definition (Hall, 2014).

Combining Theories

There are limits to each of these theories. The limit of a narrative theory is that it may excuse victims from having any obligation to change their problems. The limit with control theory is that it is culturally dependent, and some cultures do not believe in equal treatment or respect. This theory also grounds itself in a mechanical approach, and human beings are not mechanical (Ondoro, 2016). The limitation to the social exchange and choice framework is that it does not include cultural context and cross-cultural variations in the norms and principles. Risks and rewards in some cultures may vary where they do not seek a reward in a relationship.

Despite these disadvantages to the theories, they were useful for the study. Narrative theory provided significance on the victims' issues, control theory provided insight into the victim–perpetrator relationship, and the social exchange and choice framework provide insight into how people minimize risks and rationalize rewards in

their relationships. For this study, it was necessary to combine the theories to collect and analyze data.

Literature Review

Psychological abuse is not as identifiable as physical or sexual abuse (Mills, Hill, & Johnson, 2017). Psychological abuse can also be misinterpreted or denied (Williams, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit, 2012). For example, it is easy to recognize a black-eye but difficult to question someone who has diminished self-esteem. Though physical and sexual abuse can be articulated, there is no consensus on what comprises psychological abuse (Follingstad & Rogers, 2013). This lack of consensus has affected who is examined and how this phenomenon is investigated (Mills et al., 2017). However, research on psychological abuse has identified this phenomenon as the most prevalent form of aggression in society (Rogers & Follingstad, 2014). Psychological abuse is also multifaceted; when investigating psychological abuse consideration needs to be taken for conceptualization, gender, and cultural context (McHugh et al., 2013).

Perception from a research perspective determines how it is defined and conceptualized, who is affected by it (man or woman), who perpetrates it, and under the context that it occurs. Individuals who have experiences with psychological abuse perceive this phenomenon as more detrimental as opposed to those who have not experienced it (Hall, 2014). Thus, this study involved investigating the lived experiences of heterosexual men and psychological abuse. The following sections provide historical context of psychological abuse, difficulty with researching this phenomenon, the

importance of researching this phenomenon, and how psychological abuse has affected women, same-sex men, and heterosexual men.

History of Psychological Abuse

Research on psychological abuse began with investigations of women who were physically abused during the 1970s and 1980s (Follingstad, 2007; McHugh et al., 2013). Initial investigation of victims who endured physical abuse were found to be recipients of psychological abuse as well (McHugh et al., 2013; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Walker, 1979). Women who were physically abused reported distress and apprehension as a result of their significant other's use of intimidating tactics, verbal abuse, and control tactics (Dunn & Powell-Williams, 2007; Follingstad, 2007). Women who experienced psychological abuse often reported that the effects of this phenomenon were more damaging than physical abuse that accompanied it (McHugh et al., 2013). Consequently, research began to be focused on psychological abuse. Initially, physical abuse and psychological abuse were studied together with the objective of identifying the relationship between them (McHugh et al., 2013; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). When investigating battered women, it was found that psychological abuse often preceded physical abuse and created a barrier to them leaving their abusive relationships (McHugh et al., 2013; McHugh & Frieze, 2006).

Research has identified psychological abuse as a repetitive, mutually perpetrated form of IPV (Calvete et al. 2008; Follingstad & Edmundson 2010; Follingstad et al., 1990; O'Leary & Jouriles 1994; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014; Stets 1991). Psychological abuse is often examined with other forms of IPV such as physical and sexual abuse

(Hamby & Sugarman 1999; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014; Samelius et al., 2010; Tang, 1997). One of the reasons why this phenomenon has not been studied alone is due to difficulties with definition and conceptualization. Additionally, it lacks the objective factors such as those that exist with physical and sexual abuse (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014).

Difficulty with Research on Psychological Abuse

There is not a unified definition or conceptualization of psychological abuse because psychological abuse is less observable than physical or sexual abuse, making research on it difficult. Psychological abuse is more difficult to identify as compared to physical or sexual abuse (Mills et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2013; Reddy, Pickett, & Orcutt, 2006). However, researchers have attempted to state what constitutes psychological abuse (Mills et al., 2017; Jordan, Campbell, & Follingstad, 2010). For example, Comecanha et al. (2017) viewed psychological abuse as emotional where name-calling and isolation occurs. Alonso et al. (2012) also viewed psychological abuse as a series of insults and ridiculing an individual both in private and public to the degree the individual experiences psychological trauma.

There is also a difference of perspective on psychological abuse as it pertains to research and gender. There are disagreements as to how important gender is as a factor in perception of psychological abuse (Hall, 2014). There is evidence that men and women perceive psychological abuse differently, emphasizing the need for measurement tools to identify the differences in perceptions (McHugh et al., 2013). Adjustments need to be

considered for gender and the meaning of psychological abuse (Follingstad & Rogers, 2013; McHugh et al., 2013).

Additional difficulty in establishing a unified definition of psychological abuse stems from historical social roles. These roles have suggested that men are in control of their relationships and are able to manipulate relationship boundaries (Mills et al., 2017). What must also be considered is that relationship boundaries vary by culture, making it further difficult to conceptualize this phenomenon (Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Follingstad, Coyne, & Gambone, 2005; Mills et al., 2017).

There has also been differences regarding terminology. Research terms such as *emotional abuse*, *verbal abuse*, and *mental abuse* have been used synonymously when describing psychological abuse. The term used at the time when investigating psychological abuse has dictated and determined its conceptualization as well (Hall, 2014). The conflict with terminology among researchers stems from what encompasses psychological abuse (DeHart et al., 2010). Some researchers have argued that psychological abuse has two components: cognitive and emotional (Williams et al., 2012). Researchers who argue this perceive that the two necessarily do not intertwine. They define cognitive abuse as the effort to emasculate the security of an individual's judgment, whereas emotional abuse is the effort to emasculate an individual's self-worth (McHugh et al., 2013; Tilbrook, Allan, & Dear, 2010). Terminology continues to evolve as it pertains to psychological abuse, however, there is no consensus because of the difficulty with defining it.

Importance of Research on Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is beginning to be identified as harsh and detrimental behavior that happens within the context of intimate adult relationships (Shorey et al., 2012; Follingstad, 2007). Psychological abuse continues to be identified as the most prevalent form of abuse across intimate adult relationships (Shorey et al., 2012; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). The field of research (Shorey, Temple, Ferbes, Brasfield, Sherman & Stuart, 2012; Shorey et al., 2008) and theory (Bell & Naugle, 2008) have begun to emphasize the importance of investigating factors that succeed the perpetration of psychological abuse. There have been many studies that have investigated potential causes of perpetration, however research on the effects that succeed perpetrating psychological abuse are scarce (Shorey et al., 2012).

The importance of studying this phenomenon through research has shown that psychological abuse always accompanies physical abuse (McHugh et al. 2013; Henning & Klesges, 2003; Stets, 1990). Continuing to study psychological abuse it may provide deeper insight into forms of IPV, specifically physical abuse. Another reason in studying psychological abuse is that research has shown that this phenomenon has a more harmful effect on psychological functioning. In the late 1970s, Walker (1979) conducted qualitative studies of battered women and discovered that many of them considered degradation and verbal insults to have more a significant impact than the physical abuse they endured (Henning & Klesges, 2003).

Numerous research studies have suggested that psychological abuse is closely linked to a woman's psychological adjustment (Henning & Klesges, 2003; Aguilar &

Nightingale, 1994; Arias & Pape, 1999; Arias, Street, & Brody, 1996; Dutton, Goodman, & Bennett, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999). Psychological abuse appears to have a significant impact on a woman's perception of the relationship she's in and her behavior to the IPV she experiences (Henning & Klesges, 2003). Studies in the late 1990s by Sackett and Saunders (1999) and Marshall (2005) discovered that repeated psychological abuse was a better predictor of an individual's fear of ensuing aggression as oppose to the gravity of prior physical abuse.

Research continues to make strong claims about the damaging impact of psychological abuse in intimate adult relationships (Straight, Harper, & Arias, 2003; Aguilar & Nightingale, 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). Researchers have also emphasized not to adopt assumptions as facts in this field of inquiry. O'Leary (2001) argued that appropriate definitions of psychological abuse in intimate adult relationships do not exist for legal and diagnostic purposes. Maiuro (2001) argued that as a whole as it pertains to psychological abuse we do not have reliable norms regarding these behaviors. Follingstad (2007) argued that this field of inquiry is in a difficult and essentially unsound position when attempting to simplify an inexhaustible amount of research on a phenomenon that had been inadequately conceptualized (DeHart, Follingstad, & Fields, 2010).

It is cautioned that researchers should not presume a behavior to be psychological abuse unless the individual who is experiencing it perceives it as such. Regardless if the behavior and description of the incident appears plausible. Follingstad, Coyne and Gambone (2005) conducted a study with college students and discovered that context

matters as it pertains to identifying a behavior as psychological abuse. The students in this study reported that context matters. It is argued that the context of the behavior experienced by the individual can alter their interpretation of the incident (e.g. degree of psychological anguish, location of incident and events prior to the incident occurring, if the incident occurred in a public setting, and whether the incident appeared more malicious) (Follingstad & Rogers, 2013).

Additional research examining the frequency and factors of psychological abuse would be beneficial as it pertains to studying conceptualization, gender and cultural context. Presently, research is being conducted identifying the influence that psychological abuse has within the context of intimate adult relationships, however, there is still more work to be done as it pertains to conceptualization, gender and cultural context. The majority of studies that have been conducted have examined battered women (McHugh et al. 2013; Henning & Klesges, 2003; Arias & Pape, 1999; Sackett & Saunders, 1999) and female college students (McHugh et al. 2013; Henning & Klesges, 2003; Murphy & Hoover, 1999) as a result generalizability is limited.

Women and Psychological Abuse

Women have reported that the invisibility of psychological abuse is attributed to family, friends and law enforcement who view such incidents as insignificant or reasonably meaningless. The reasoning is since there are no visible wounds individuals who experience psychological abuse state they never receive the help they need (William, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit, 2012). Psychological abuse is a form of abuse that does not receive the same public attention that sexual and physical abuse does.

Women who have been affected by psychological abuse have found to have a significant negative image of self (Gervias & Davidson, 2013). Additionally, women who have experience psychological abuse have reported severe emotional neglect and mental illness (Mauritz, Goossens, Draijer & van Achterberg, 2013). Women who have experienced psychological abuse have resulted in increased alcohol and drug use and self-harm. These were used as coping strategies to combat the psychological abuse they experienced (Macdonald, 2013).

From a public perspective, women state that it is less likely to be viewed as significant as physical or sexual abuse. It is also less likely to garner any sympathy for an individual who experiences psychological abuse because there are no visible signs (William, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit, 2012). Research examining women who have experienced physical and psychological abuse have found a commonality of six types of psychological abusive behaviors they have experienced (threats of abuse, ridicule, jealousy, threats of divorce, restriction and damage to property). Women in these studies also expounded upon frequency and impact of these behaviors at it pertains to context, intent and consequences of psychological abuse (Follingstad, 2011).

The general approach used when identifying psychological abuse usually derives from qualitative studies of a diverse group of women, from different cultures and ethnicities (William et al., 2012; Seff, Beaulaurier, & Newman, 2008). Research places the emphasis on women because society perceives them normally as the victims of IPV. Women who have reported their experiences of psychological abuse have stated that it has a significant and more lasting impact of their self-esteem and self-image.

Additionally, these women hold the belief that some individuals take a gradual process to heal from psychological abuse and some never recover at all (William et al., 2012).

Same-Sex Men and Psychological Abuse

Research identifies that same-sex men experience psychological abuse (Randle & Graham, 2011). Unfortunately, research on same-sex men lived experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV) is limited to sexual and physical abuse. In a qualitative study of IPV conducted in the United Kingdom in 2006 identified some reasons why same-sex men do not report psychological abuse. One of the main reasons why same sex men do not report psychological abuse is because it is inconsistent with societal perceptions of masculinity (Randle & Graham, 2011; Donovan, Hester, Holmes, & McCarry, 2006; Letellier, 1994). Additionally, there is a stigma of appearing weak or helpless along with being a same-sex man who experience IPV.

Some research argues that there are same sex men who value their masculinity (Sanchez, Bocklandt, & Vilain, 2009). Same-sex men report feeling societal pressure as heterosexual men do by adhering to societal norms of masculinity (Hogan, 2016; McKenry, Serovich, Mason, & Mosack, 2006). Societal perception of masculinity as contributed to same-sex men not identifying themselves as victims. Consequently, the stigma of being a victim and same-sex man has significantly influenced reporting of sexual, physical and psychological abuse altogether that occurs within same-sex male relationships (Hogan, 2016).

Unfortunately, feminist perspectives have indirectly contributed to the oversight of abuse specifically psychological abuse that occurs in male same-sex relationships.

Feminist perspectives have mainly focused on the patriarchal hierarchy within heterosexual relationships (Oliffe, Han, Maria, Lohan, Howard, Stewart, & MacMillan, 2014). With insufficient evidence of understanding how IPV occurs in same-sex relationships it creates an even wider gap as to what constitutes psychological abuse in male same-sex relationships (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013). Furthermore, as it pertains to IPV there are not a sufficient amount of outcome measures that can be used for male victims of IPV in general (Randle & Graham, 2011). Without a sufficient amount of research on this demographic no definite conclusions can be made about the nature of psychological abuse for this population (Hogan, 2016; Finneran & Stephenson, 2013).

Men and Psychological Abuse

Research shows that men can experience psychological abuse (Follingstad, 2007; McHugh, Rakowski, & Swiderski, 2013; Follingstad & Rogers, 2013). In this study, McHugh et al. (2013) showed that female partners of heterosexual men used controlling tactics e.g. manipulation. These men also reported their lived experiences of psychological abuse as manipulative behavior and disdainful comments about their sexual prowess. Research has identified that men who experience psychological abuse do not generally report due to the belief it should be held privately.

There is also the belief that law enforcement would not support them and that society's perception is that only men are perpetrators, not victims (Neeley-Bertrand, 2010). Further analysis showed that men are fifty percent more likely to experience controlling tactics by their female partner (McDonald et al., 2009; Hines & Douglas, 2010). Research has identified that the societal belief is that women cannot be more

aggressive towards men either physically or psychologically. This has resulted in men declining to seek assistance for their victimization. Generally, men do not disclose their victimization due to embarrassment, anxiety and stigmatization that they view as being victims of psychological abuse (Tsui, Cheung, & Leung, 2010).

A qualitative study conducted in Europe (Sweden) studied male victims who reported psychological distress from their female partners (Linder & Widh, 2014). One of the individuals who participated in the study reported he was in a 10-month relationship with his female partner where he experienced physical aggression and psychological abuse (Linder & Widh, 2014).

He reported the following: “She made me think I was being too sensitive and that I was not masculine enough. It was not just with the physical aggression. If I did not speak up for myself or if she said something that hurt me I would get slapped in the face. Ultimately, I began to give in and give her what she wanted. I began to discover I wasn’t myself anymore. Many of my friends noticed and brought to my attention several times and said that I changed. I had become cold and boring.” (Linder & Widh, 2014)

It seems that due to the physical and psychological abuse experienced his masculinity began to come in question. Initially, the individual was not embodying the ideals of masculinity that his girlfriend thought he needed to demonstrate (Linder & Widh, 2014). He reported allegations of being overly sensitive when he complained about the physical aggression. He also reported he was encouraged to accept the physical aggression because that was part of being a man (Linder & Widh, 2014).

Courtenay (2000) explains that hegemonic (ruling or dominant) masculinity came into question when he did not accept the physical aggression directed towards him. Ultimately, in order not to be viewed as weak or overly sensitive he began to accept the physical abuse. Thus, it seems to be a similarity between his girlfriend and society and what is perceived as being a masculine man. Tsui et al. (2010) stated that men do not consider themselves victims because they see complaining about being abused as a major weakness in themselves (Linder & Widh, 2014).

A qualitative study conducted by (Migliaccio, 2002) of 12 men who self-identified as abused men stated that society's reluctance to accept them as a victim restricted their ability to discuss their lived experience. It was found that their masculinity was challenged and societal expectations of them were to reaffirm their standing within the relationship as "being the man." Subsequently, hegemonic masculinity has a significant influence on men and affects their self-image (Josolyne, 2011).

Presently, there is evidence that men have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). Within the realm of IPV there is physical, sexual and psychological abuse. What is not clear is the heterosexual male's lived experience with psychological abuse? There is understanding of the relationship between physical and psychological abuse, however, there is little to no evidence from a gender and contextual perspective how psychological abuse affects men.

Summary

Psychological abuse is one of the three forms of intimate partner violence. This phenomenon has been identified as one of the most prevalent forms of abuse that occurs

within intimate adult relationships. Psychological abuse is invisible to the naked eye. Self-esteem can be easily overlooked. The lack of unanimity on what entails psychological abuse has also affected who is examined and how this phenomenon is investigated. Perception affects who is impacted by psychological abuse.

Overall, research has established an understanding that psychological abuse is a significant issue within our society. There is understanding of how this phenomenon affects women and their lived experiences. The question remains what lived experiences of heterosexual men are for those who endure psychological abuse. The purpose of this study is establishing how heterosexual men who experience describe psychological abuse. These perspectives of what comprises psychological abuse and how their lived experiences influence their lives would possibly provide insight for medical and mental health practitioners as well as inform future research. This chapter outlined the literature as it relates to this study. In Chapter 3, I present details regarding the research methodology, research design, and selection of participants, measures and ethical protection and data collection.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Purpose of the Study

I examined how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse describe it. Psychological abuse is one of the three identified forms of IPV and is multifaceted. Researchers have examined psychological abuse from many different perspectives, but these have not included the perspective from heterosexual men (McHugh et al., 2013). This study was focused on heterosexual men over the age of 18 years old. Open-ended questions were used to examine how participants described and understood psychological abuse. This chapter contains a description of the study design, data collection, analysis and instrumentation, and issues surrounding protection of human subjects and ethical considerations.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative studies (Tracy, 2013). The researcher has the following responsibilities: developing interview questions, designing the study, researching possible areas to find potential participants, and collecting and analyzing data along with furnishing research results. Researchers are in all aspects of their respective study (Xu & Storr, 2012).

Through the military, I have encountered heterosexual men who have experienced some form of psychological abuse by either their female significant other or spouse. But many of these occurrences placed the men as the perpetrators. Many of these cases have not considered the circumstances or evidence showing heterosexual men as the victims.

I approached each participant as a cofacilitator, allowing them to be the expert in their experiences. I acted as an observer to their respective history and experiences. I ensured that each participant had autonomy through the interview process and if needed follow up with clarifying questions as needed. Additionally, I worked to remain impartial through this study.

Research Methodology

To gain understanding of participant language and how they viewed and described psychological abuse, the nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research has been used for accessing the subjective dimensions of how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse describe it for themselves as it relates to their personal experience with this phenomenon (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011). I hoped to provide data for informing future research with heterosexual men who experience this phenomenon. Participants' experiences show how heterosexual men describe psychological abuse.

Research Design

I used a phenomenological, qualitative approach, which was appropriate for describing and interpreting the lived experiences of heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This design allowed me to gather rich accounts that established a comprehensive perspective of their experiences (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenology is used to define and decode facets of phenomenon to include observations, thoughts, principles, and emotions experienced by people. Phenomenology assumes that people perceive, describe, decode, and construct meanings to occurrences

that provide value to their lives (Holroyd, 2007). Gaining a comprehensive understanding of experiences is done through exploring cultural, situational, and social contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is one of the four categories of phenomenology, with the others being realistic, existential, and constitutive. It comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuin*, meaning interpret, explain, or clarify (Holroyd, 2007). Heidegger is credited in advancing hermeneutic phenomenology, along with Kant, who argued that phenomena can be decoded based on prior understanding because people cannot separate themselves from the rest of the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Heidegger also emphasized previous knowledge, experiences, and personal views, which can be used when studying a phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). These arguments provided the foundation for hermeneutic phenomenology as a research design (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, experiences vary over time for each culture and individual. These experiences influence interpretations by researchers and research participants. The intent of hermeneutic phenomenology is focusing on the process of analyzing and understanding the reality of human experiences as well as incorporating associations, behaviors, and skills while taking social, cultural, and political contexts into account (Freeman & Given, 2008; Holroyd, 2007; Patterson & Williams, 2002; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology is consistent with the objectives of this study, the research questions, and philosophy and research design. The interpretive and descriptive nature of hermeneutic phenomenology, its context-based and holistic

approach, along with epistemological and ontological principles, were essential to explore the lived experiences of heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse.

Participants of the Study

Purposive sampling was used to select 10 research participants. This approach is applicable for different methods of qualitative research design to include phenomenological study (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007; Sandelowski, 1995). Purposive sampling is a sampling method used to identify individuals who have prior knowledge and experience about a phenomenon to address the topic being studied (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Dattalo, 2008). The number of participants was fixed to 10, which included individuals from various backgrounds and to generate authentic accounts of their experiences.

When identifying research participants, treatment facilities in central and southern Texas were contacted. A facility that treats men who report experiencing psychological abuse was contacted. The center has a team of licensed clinical professionals who specialize in addressing mental health concerns like psychological abuse. The program director provided assistance in posting flyers to reach out to potential research participants based on the criteria set.

Demographics

Data were collected from heterosexual men who are or were in a relationship with a woman, which consisted of either being married or divorced, living in the same domestic dwelling, or having recently dissolved the relationship. The age range was 18 years of age and older. The following variables were included: age, ethnicity, occupation

status, economic status, children (if any) living in the home, length of relationship, and educational status.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for participants included heterosexual men over the age of 18 years old; therefore, children, teenagers, and heterosexual men under the age of 18 were excluded from this study. Heterosexual men who reported having experiences with psychological abuse by their aggressive female significant other were recruited. These were not men who are presently receiving treatment but men who have already received treatment and could describe their experiences of psychological abuse. The program director of the treatment center helped in attaining approval of posting flyers across the campus to reach out to possible participants.

Measures

The purpose of this study was to explore how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse describe it. Interviews were conducted via phone or face to face. Interview questions were open-ended with the objective of understanding how the participants describe their experiences with psychological abuse. Interview questions were field tested via subject matter experts and researchers who have analyzed psychological abuse. If a participant would have experienced signs of distress they had the option to discontinue the study and contact a resource (i.e., therapist or emergency hotline) to deescalate their distress. Questions for the interview are listed in Appendix A.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse describe their experiences?

Research Question 2: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it?

Research Question 3: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse distinguish the differences between subtle and severe psychological abuse?

Ethical Protection of Participants

The participants in this study were heterosexual male volunteers who were free to choose whether to participate. There is some knowledge of traumatization associated with participating in this study. If a participant began to experience harm or has difficulty associated with participating in this study, a referral to local services would have been made.

It is important that a researcher adheres to ethical issues to protect research participants (Mack, 2005; Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2005). Throughout the entire research process consideration was taken for ethical issues (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Research participants were informed of the purpose for this research, their roles, and possible benefits for participation in this study as well as their rights to discontinue participation and refuse to answer questions. Participants communicated their ability to participate in the study and share their lived experiences of psychological abuse.

Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants. Research participants were treated in an ethical manner; additionally, their dignity and autonomy will be respected. The principle of confidentiality would be maintained by modifying identifying information about the research participants and utilizing aliases in the research report. Phone or face to face interviews, transcribed texts and field notes would be properly stored to maintain security and confidentiality.

Risk and Benefits of Participants

Confidentiality is paramount and the main risk to participants in this study is psychological. Defining psychological abuse and discussing personal experiences may possibly bring about emotions that may be painful and possibly leave participants in an adverse emotional state. In order to minimize risk, it was emphasized to participants that they could discontinue participation of the interview at any time. Information to resources for experience with psychological abuse were provided along with an information hotline for individuals to talk to in case participants perceived they were re-experiencing psychological trauma.

Procedures

The following procedures served as a sequential guide to recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze data, and validate findings.

1. Contact, via telephone, Central and Southern Texas treatment centers that treat heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse to provide information about the study.

2. Send informative letter detailing the nature of the study to Central and Southern Texas treatment centers and request assistance in recruiting heterosexual male participants.
3. Schedule an informative meeting via telephone with each identified heterosexual male participant individually to present proposed study and provide a copy of letter describing the study via e-mail.
4. Request interested male participants would contact researcher individually to confirm receipt of initial interview either via e-mail or telephone. A follow-up telephone call was be made if there is no contact within one week of informative meeting.
5. Prior to engaging in their individual interview, each participant would be given a copy of the letter describing the proposed study and sign the Consent Form. The interview would also include research questions listed in Appendix A.
6. Phone or face to face interviews were be transcribed verbatim, avoiding any handwritten errors or miscommunications and analyzed according to steps outlined at the end of this chapter.
7. Themes extracted from transcripts were reviewed and verified. Verification procedures adhered to the ethical protection of participants previously identified in this proposal.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews are key data collection method for a phenomenological study and to gain a good understanding of participants' experiences. Interviews are essential in

order to establish a complete picture of the context and to understand the experiences of participants (Denscombe, 2007; Bloor & Wood, 2006). The advantage of in-depth interviews is that it allows for flexibility to cover a myriad of issues through discussion, probing, and exploration. This approach explores the participants' motivations, thoughts, goals, emotions, perspectives and principles (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Open-ended interview guides were framed based on literature and research questions. The sections of the interview guide consisted of contexts for occurrence of psychological abuse, types and effects of psychological abuse and problems experienced by heterosexual men who experienced psychological abuse. The interview sessions would be conducted in September and October 2018 via phone or face-to-face and utilize open-ended interview questions.

Prior to interviews being distributed rapport was established with the participants. The purpose of the study was provided and briefed to participants. The participants were provided informed consent via e-mail to take part in the study and then coordinate a time convenient for participants to engage in the interview. The objective would be to find 10 participants for in-depth interviews. These were heterosexual men who are able to effectively communicate and describe how they experienced psychological abuse. I personally ensured all interviews are received by participants and interviews were answered via phone or face to face method to avoid any handwritten discrepancies.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) would be used to analyze data. IPA is informed by hermeneutic phenomenology and it utilizes both descriptive and

interpretive processes to analyze data and assist in understanding participants' lived experiences (Finlay, 2012, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Creswell, Clark & Morales, 2007). The procedures of IPA were used and as cited by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Creswell, Clark and Morales (2007) these procedures outlined by Moustakas and Creswell would be followed.

The next step is the initial noting, focusing on the text and identifying significant phrases or statements that correlate to the participants' experience, any personal thoughts and emotions were coded for specific themes using descriptive words. Developing emerging themes is the next step. The primary objective under this step would be reading transcribed text again, identifying and listing any statements that would not be repetitive or overlapped. Afterwards statements were categorized into meaning units and clustered into larger themes.

The other step is known as composite description. After analyzing data gathered from each of the 10 participants separately, it would be synthesized in line with themes to describe, interpret and present it in an aggregate form. In order to expound on some points and provide verbatim accounts, cases were included in the descriptions. In the final step of data presentation, findings of this study were presented, described and interpreted in Chapter Four.

Issues of Trustworthiness

There are four components of qualitative research, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility means the accuracy of findings and that a researcher's findings are substantiated (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

Transferability encompasses a description of the population and geographic limitations of the study. Dependability is when another researcher can replicate a researcher's study. Confirmability refers to objectivity and ensuring that the results of this study reflects the experiences of the heterosexual male participants. Additionally, an audit of data worked towards ruling out researcher bias.

When researchers can repeat a researcher's findings it is called reliability. The more times a research study can be replicated the more reliable the phenomenon. The world we live in is fluid, an individual's behavior is always in flux and the qualitative researcher understands this. For this particular study I would try to ensure that participants have autonomy as they participate in this research study and ask clarifying questions if needed.

The Institutional Review Board at Walden University

The Institutional Review Board at Walden University is responsible for ensuring that all Walden University research studies are in compliance with Walden University's ethical standards, as well as current United States Federal Regulations. IRB approval is required before any collection or examination of any data. Once the proposal is accepted a full IRB application outlining each of the ethical considerations were submitted. Any and all identifiable information that pertains to names, places or other confidential information were removed.

Research participants' participation would be voluntary. Access to data for this study would be limited to this researcher, chairperson and committee member upon acceptance of the IRB process. Data for this study would be kept for at least a minimum

of five years from acceptance of this dissertation. There are physical safeguards where data would be kept on an external hard drive to avoid any malicious damage. It would be difficult for the external hard drive to be connected to any other computer outside of this researcher's Apple Computer, which is password-protected.

Verification of Findings

These research findings would be verified which is common in qualitative studies. Verification of findings keeps the spirit of qualitative analysis intact and stands on its own merit (Creswell, Clark, & Morales, 2007). There are two of eight steps that are required when verifying the findings. It is recommended that the researcher use procedures that encompass either strategic sequencing of methods, triangulation, dialogic engagement, multiple coding, structured reflexivity processes, participant validation strategies (member checks), rich and thick description, or disconfirming evidence (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Of the eight steps mentioned, the proposed research would employ participant validation strategies (member checks), and rich, thick description.

Copies of the original transcript were provided along with copies of the findings that contain the individual structural descriptions and the composite description of the research participants as a whole. The first form of verification would stem from participant validation strategies (member checks). This involves checking-in on the participants in order to evaluate and test the researcher's interpretations as well as authenticate the accuracy of this researcher's analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The final form of verification stems from having a rich, thick description. The purpose of detailed description pertains to transferability and sees if findings can be

transferred to other settings. The proposed study would have verbatim transcripts providing contextual and descriptive information. There would be notes located within the transcript underlining meaning units and any direct quotes from research participants. Each of the methods of analysis was important in providing a rich, thick description.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I provided an in-depth discussion of the research methodology used in this study. I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. Purposive sampling was used with a combination of criterion, six heterosexual male participants were selected. Data was collected using open-ended interview questions. Interviews were conducted via phone or face to face. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze data. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore how heterosexual men experience psychological abuse. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to purposefully select six self-identified heterosexual men from a population of men who had received treatment through a college campus counseling services. A phenomenological inquiry was used to collect data through open-ended questions directed at recalling the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. Open-ended questions were used to invoke conversation and explanations that stimulated dialogue of the participants' meanings, feelings, and language of what happened (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Participants' responses are documented along with handwritten field notes during the interviews to document thoughts through this examination. Each participant had their transcript, and results were abridged in a document. Each participant was provided with a summary and thus the member check process was addressed. Participants endorsed and validated their findings through feedback. A comprehensive description of the procedures can be found in Chapter 3.

The following research questions are the basis of this study:

Research Question 1: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse describe their experiences?

Research Question 2: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it?

Research Question 3: How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse distinguish the differences between subtle and severe psychological abuse?

This chapter reintroduces the study's purpose, and answers to the research questions would be presented as well. The following are included in this chapter: research setting, demographics, data collection, and evidence of trustworthiness. The results and summary conclude this chapter.

Research Setting

This study began after IRB approval (approval no. 09-27-18-0585491) and the flyer used to recruit for this study. These flyers were posted in a men's public restroom. Potential participants voluntarily contacted me via cell phone after reading the flyer describing this study. Each potential participant was assessed to see if they met eligibility criteria of self-identifying as a heterosexual man who experienced psychological abuse.

The same interview questions were used for each participant. Each interview took place via phone call and was conducted in a private setting to avoid any potential disturbances. The interviews took place in an environment to ensure privacy and confidentiality for each participant. There were no personal or organizational conditions that could have affected participants or their ability to participate in this study.

All participants in this study were over 18 years of age. This was done with the college's approval. I obtained an acceptable number of participants to allow this study to move forward. The final total of participants were six heterosexual men who all self-reported having experiences with psychological abuse, though the objective was to find

10 heterosexual men. However, previous research (Widh & Linder, 2014) has identified difficulty with finding willing participants, especially heterosexual men. Previous research has also shown a reluctance or hesitancy with this demographic as it pertains to discussing their experiences with IPV (Widh & Linder, 2014).

Demographics

This study consisted of six heterosexual men who self-identified as either Caucasian, African American, Latino, or Afro-Latino. Heterogeneity was represented in this study by the following: one was Afro-Latino, two were African American, one was Caucasian, and two were Latino, Mexican American. This study's sample represented diversity of heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse (see Creswell, Clark, & Morales, 2007). The sample represented the demographic characteristics of this study, age, ethnicity, education, household composition, children in the home, employment status, and length of relationship. This study also had three common characteristics: (a) heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse, (b) resided in the state of Texas for at least 2 years, and (c) dissolved their previous relationship of psychological abuse at least a year ago prior to this study. Demographics are represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
Age	35.8	4.7%
18–25	0	0%
26–34	3	50%
35 and older	3	50%
Ethnicity		
Mexican American	2	33%
Caucasian	1	16%
African American	2	33%
Afro-Latino	1	16%
Education		
High School Diploma/GED	2	33%
Some college	2	33%
College graduate	2	33%
Household composition		
Single, never married	4	66%
Married or domestic relationship	2	33%
Divorced	0	0%
Separated	0	0%
Children in the home		
Under 5 years old	0	0%
Under 12 years old	2	33%
Under 18 years old	2	33%
None	2	33%
Employment status		
Employed (part time)	2	33%
Employed (full time)	2	33%
Out of work fewer than 6 months	0	0%
Out of work more than 6 months	0	0%
Full-time student	2	33%
Retired	0	0%
Length of relationship		
Fewer than 2 years		
Between 2–4 years	1	16%
Between 5–7years	2	33%
Between 8–10 years	1	16%
More than 10 years	2	33%

Each participant in this study self-identified as a heterosexual man who has previously experienced psychological abuse. The mean age for this group was 35.8 ($SD = 4.7$). The oldest participant was 42-years old, whereas the youngest participant was 30-years old. Employment status varied, and others chose to be student full time. Educational status of participants varied as well with some having already attained their bachelor's degree whereas some were working to attain their college degree. Three out of the six participants still have children living in the home with them while one participant reported not having any children.

Participant Profiles

The following participant profiles are presented in alphabetical order by their alias. This section provides information about the study participants' experiences with psychological abuse.

Participant A1. He is a recently divorced 39-year-old African-Latino male who was born in El Paso, Texas. He divorced over 18 months ago prior to this study and reported his relationship status as single but dating. He reported being in the relationship for over 18 years. He lives alone and there are no children in the home. He has a high school education but desired to attain a college degree. He is the biological father of a 22-year-old daughter and 21-year-old son. He identified as a full-time college student.

Participant B2. He is a 42-year-old African-American male who is originally from Houston, Texas. He has been married twice and recently divorced his significant other over a year ago. He reported being in this past relationship for over 5 years. He has three children, 18, 16, and 15 years of age, by different biological mothers. He stated that

he is presently dating but not looking for anything serious right now. He has completed his associate's degree and is looking to attend a 4-year institution. He is also working part time while attending college.

Participant C3. He is a recently divorced 38-year-old Caucasian male who is originally from Seguin, Texas. He has one child who lives in the home with him, a 6-year-old, whom he states he has full custody. He also stated that he is not looking to date right now and is focusing on being a father. His last relationship was over a year ago, and he was with that individual for 6 years. He has completed his bachelor's degree and hopes to move toward attaining a master's degree. He is presently working full time.

Participant D4. He is a 30-year-old Latino, Mexican American male who is originally from Temple, Texas. He has no children and is in no desire to be in a relationship anytime soon. He just got out of a relationship a year and a half ago and he was with that individual for 3 years. He just began attending college and wanted that to be his focus right now. He is also working part time.

Participant E5. He is a 35-year old African-American male who is originally from Dallas, Texas. He has two children ages 16 and 12. His most recent relationship lasted 17 years. Both children currently live in the home with him. He also has other family members who live in the home with him as well. He is dating but avoided identifying if he is married or divorced. He is close to completing his bachelor's degree and is working full time as well.

Participant F6. He is a 31-year-old Latino, Mexican American male who is originally from Houston, Texas. He has an 8-year-old who does not reside with him right

now but is working to change that situation. His most recent relationship lasted 8 years. He says he is dating but not looking to settle down. He is a full-time college student but is looking to pick up a part-time job soon. He just enrolled in school and has plans to complete his bachelor's degree.

Data Collection and Storage

Data collection began with the permission from Walden IRB. Each participant conducted the interview via phone, as described in Chapter 3. All interviews began with a review and understanding of the consent form. In conjunction with review of consent form, each individual received a copy the consent form. During September and October, flyers discussing the nature of study were posted throughout the college, which resulted in eight potential participants. Out of the eight potential participants, six continued with the study and met inclusion criteria, attending the interviews via phone call.

Qualitative data were collected with each of the six participants during the interview. Participants were interviewed via phone in a private office, though participants were informed that they could conduct the interview face to face. No identifiable information was used during this study; instead pseudonyms were used to identify each participant. Each participant was identified with a letter of the alphabet and number.

Each participant was notified prior to the interview that they were not obligated at any time to answer any of the questions that would bring about any psychological discomfort. There were six open-ended questions during the interview used to draw out information about the participants' experiences with psychological abuse. These questions also helped analyze participants' perspectives of how they viewed

psychological abuse along with behaviors exhibited by their female significant other that led to the belief that they were experiencing psychological abuse.

Each participant acknowledged and agreed to participate in the interview. When interviews were concluded, demographic data were reviewed as well. Each participant was provided a copy of the demographic form. Each interview varied between 30 minutes to an hour to complete. Interviews were filed and securely stored on my computer. Each interview was transcribed by me and securely stored in a locked safe at my home. All identifiable information was removed from the transcripts prior to verification procedures (see Davidson, 2009).

Data Analysis

Each interview was organized, printed, and analyzed using a multistep process. The initial step in data analysis was reading and reviewing each transcript several times to ensure that there was a general understanding of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The next step was reviewing responses made by participants that highlighted a specific experience of psychological abuse. Specific responses that highlighted an experience of psychological abuse were categorized and reframed into descriptive expressions using everyday language concerning feelings, and behavior relevant to their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This multistep process provided themes relevant to the lived experiences of heterosexual men who experienced psychological abuse by their female significant other. Based on specific themes, individual descriptions were formed by listing the general themes of each participant at the end of the transcript. Each description of their

experiences was then consolidated by similarity to establish an overall group description (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Individual and group descriptions are provided later in this chapter. The following codes are used along with short definitions. Direct statements from participant interviews provide insight to the meaning of each code.

Code 1: Manipulation

The code of manipulation emerged when participants described behaviors that indicated psychological abuse. Participants described the intent to control a significant other's emotional state for personal advantage. Participant C3 demonstrated this code in the first statement. Participant's E5 demonstrated this code in this statement:

Manipulation could be a way to keep a person under your thumb. It would be a way to keep them in line and do what you want them to do. So, like threatening to keep sex away from you would be a way to keep someone in line.

Participant E5 also stated, "The emotional and verbal negative behavior is used to keep you in line. You feel like your manhood is being questioned. You stop responding in hopes that it would just end but it doesn't. It's constant, over and over attacking you."

Code 2: Intimidation

The code of intimidation was used when participants described how they understood and defined psychological abuse. Participants described inciting fear through controlling tactics. This code was personified by Participant's A1 statement,

You'll find yourself in a situation where you're asking yourself "how did I get here?" Then you find it hard to get out of, I mean, it's like you're in a cycle of

doing something because someone else is making you do these things. I always thought I would be in control, but this was not the case.

Code 3: Loss of Respect

The code of loss of respect was used when participants described how they understood and defined psychological abuse. Participants described how there was constant negative verbal comments to attack their character. This code was personified by Participant E5's statement,

Initially, you don't pay it any attention. It starts off with a slap here and a punch there but then it blows up where anything can be used as a weapon or a means of intimidation. You may not see the physical abuse as much, but it now comes in the form of threats or the possibility of harm that may come to you.

Code 4: Physical Tactics

The code of physical tactics was used when participants described how they understood and defined psychological abuse. Participants described how certain physical behaviors were used toward them. This code was illustrated by Participant E5's statement,

There were moments when physical stuff happened but I chalked it up to temper tantrums. I looked at the physical stuff as a build up to the emotional and verbal attacks that took place. Yeah, I got hit but I'm still a man. It's not like it was another man hitting on me, so I dealt with it. Like I said the emotional and verbal baggage combined with the physical stuff was overbearing.

Code 5: Low self-esteem/Loss of will

These codes low self-esteem and loss of will appeared interchangeable. These codes were used when participants were describing how participants understood and defined psychological abuse. This code was illustrated by participant's C3 statement:

I believe it is a lack of understanding when things have gone too far. You don't want to find yourself saying it but the emotional and controlling behaviors hit you hard. They leave deep scars in your mind. What happens when you're dealing with it it's like not always directly in your face. It is more like small jabs almost like boxing. It hits you one time you may not feel it as much but over a period of time it slowly knocks you down. Eventually, you find yourself in a place where you thought you would never be.

Code 6: Threats of harm

The code of threats of harm emerged when participants were describing different types of psychological abuse tactics. These codes were used when participants were describing how participants distinguished between subtle and severe types of psychological abuse they experienced. This code was personified by participant's D4 statement:

You don't sweat the small stuff. You look at it like why is she acting like that. Where is all this disrespect coming from. Then when it starts to hit you it's like damn what the hell is happening here. How the hell did it come to this. It went from once in a blue moon to like war every day, arguing almost every day, to the point you don't even know what the hell you're arguing about.

Code 7: Threats of withholding sex

The code of threats of withholding sex emerged when participants were describing the different types of psychological abuse tactics. These codes were used when participants were describing how participants distinguished between subtle and severe types of psychological abuse they experienced. This code was illustrated by participant's B2 statement:

I don't think psychological abuse happens all at one time. There is a buildup. In the beginning its like something that can be easily overlooked. So like sex, in the beginning you use to be so loving but then now you're being told if you don't do a certain thing then you won't have sex. You find yourself doing those things whether you like it or not because you want to have sex. You lose respect for yourself. If the sex is good it helps you handle the crazy stuff.

These seven codes resulted into three primary themes from this present research. All findings identify the lived experiences of these heterosexual male participants. Previous research has identified that men do experience psychological abuse and that they experience this phenomenon differently from their female counterparts.

Data Verification

The verification process was conducted after interviews were completed, transcribed and analyzed. The data for this study verified by participant validation strategies (member checks) and a rich, thick description (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Of the methods utilized in this study a rich, thick description has been used by the method of

direct quotes from transcribed interviews that provided support for the expressions listed in the group description which is identified in the next section.

The process of participant validation strategies (member checks) was completed after transcripts were analyzed and verified. Participant validation strategies (member checks) is a process of verification, authenticating the findings or results with each of the participants involved in the research study. Questions were established based on the general description of the experience and are located in Appendix A. Each participant was then asked the interview questions via phone.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There are four components to qualitative research, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These four components can be comparable or similar to internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (see Creswell, Clark, & Morales, 2007). Evidence of trustworthiness and the application for this study follow next.

Credibility

For qualitative research credibility is like internal validity where the results of the study are agreed upon while describing reality in a truthful manner (see Creswell, Clark, & Morales, 2007). This approach is used in qualitative research to ascertain credibility while ensuring truthful descriptions of the study's participants' viewpoints and experiences. All threats to credibility lie within accurately capturing how research participants depict their experiences. Triangulation was used in this study to include triangulation, disconfirming evidence and researcher reflexivity (Dezin, 1978, Moustakas, 1994).

To confirm accuracy of the descriptions I performed a systematic process of sorting through data to discover shared themes by eliminating overlapping areas. The narratives from the interviews and field notes were used to find any major and/or minor themes. Additionally, I looked through each narrative account to establish any preliminary themes in this study as well as search through data that would either confirm or disconfirm these themes. A third and final validity procedure was the role of the researcher where my personal beliefs, values and biases are reported.

Transferability

This is where the findings of a research study can be generalized to other environments, situations and with other research studies (Creswell, 2002). Each participant has a detailed demographic profile and circumstantial narratives. The procedures of this study are outlined as well as the data analysis. The demographic profiles and circumstantial narratives can be used by other researchers to determine their own conclusions about the dependability of this research and whether the findings can be transferred to other environments of interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, this research study's data would be held for a minimum of five years which during that time would allow other researchers the opportunity to review if interested. Generalization of these findings to other populations may be challenging because this study was limited to heterosexual men who lived in the state of Texas.

Dependability

In qualitative research dependability highlights and reflects truthfulness, reliability and consistency. Triangulation was used to establish dependability. All

documentation and field notes were significant data by which this study and findings flowed. Both documentation and field notes were uploaded and organized making recovery of information much easier.

The details of collecting data and reflecting upon the overall analysis only adds to the reliability of this study. Open-ended questions were used to create meaning through dialogue with participants. Ultimately, triangulation was used to provide sufficient documentation of procedures and understanding created through communication between this researcher and its participants, which in turn supports dependability of research results (Dezin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Conformability

Reflexivity was used through the lens of the role of the researcher. Reflexivity established conformability because it identifies how data was constructed along with beliefs and biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My personal notes documented my personal beliefs and biases throughout the process of this study. Hence, my biases were made aware. I have had experiences with heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse and stigma that was attached to them.

There is a lack of research in this area and understanding of how heterosexual men experience psychological abuse. Additionally, there is also a lack of proper treatment to address this demographic as well. Overall, I had to keep a keen awareness of my biases, be attentive to participants' narratives, record and document with accuracy and analyze themes as they progressed. Ultimately, I worked diligently to circumvent interfering with the findings of this study by implementing the described approaches.

Results

There were six interviews conducted in this study. All six heterosexual men self-identified as men who experienced psychological abuse by their female significant other. The ages of these participants ranged from 30 to 42 years old. There were no participants who shared an age but two who were one year apart from each other. Results of this study showed that all six participants had direct experience with psychological abuse.

There are three themes that emerged to answer the three research questions in this study. The following themes were Behaviors that indicate psychological abuse, Defining and Understanding Psychological Abuse (see Table 2) and Different types of Psychological Abuse Tactics (see Table 3). Behaviors that indicate psychological abuse summarizes the most prevalent behaviors demonstrated by participants' female significant other. Defining and Understanding Psychological Abuse summarizes how participants view this phenomenon from their experiences. Lastly, Different types of Psychological Abuse Tactics describes methods used by participants' female significant other.

Research Question 1

Heterosexual men who experienced psychological abuse ranged from either being married or in a domestic relationship. None of the heterosexual male participants remained in their psychological abusive relationships. A unique characteristic of this study is that heterosexual men who experience this phenomenon there is little research in this area. Specifically, this study focused on heterosexual men and their ability to share their experiences in a qualitative research study. Each participant experienced

psychological abuse by their female significant other over a period of time. Each participant stated that psychological abuse is subjective.

Within these narratives participants discussed how stigma kept them from disclosing. They also stated how masculinity played a pivotal role in them remaining in the relationship as long as they did. Participants in this study confirmed what previous research has discovered that they experienced manipulative behavior and disdainful comments questioning their manliness and sexual prowess (McHugh et al., 2013). This study suggests that heterosexual men may face some of the same experiences as women. This current study also suggests that heterosexual men are hindered by societal perception from disclosing their experiences with psychological abuse.

Behaviors that indicate psychological abuse. This theme was regarded by participants as the most common behavior identified with psychological abuse. The most prevalent behavior was manipulation which was used to control the individual being abused. References towards words such as control, intimidate, and domination were descriptive behaviors that fell into categories, which occurred 32 times in the interview transcripts (control = 17, intimidate = 12, and domination = 3).

Participant C3 placed emphasis on manipulation when discussing his direct experience with psychological abuse: “Manipulation could be a way to keep a person under your thumb. It would be a way to keep them in line and do what you want them to do. So, like threatening to keep sex away from you would be a way to keep someone in line.”

Participant A1 indirectly emphasized manipulation when making the following statements. “You’ll find yourself in a situation where you’re asking yourself how did I get here. Then you find it hard to get out of, I mean, it’s like you’re in a cycle of doing something because someone else is making you do these things. I always thought I would be in control but this was not the case” (Participant A1). It appears that Participant A1 was initially unaware when manipulation was occurring in their relationship. This quotation shares the same underlying theme of manipulation and how initially one cannot be aware that it is presently happening within their relationship:

You just don’t look at it like you’re being played. You see it and think to yourself that it is something else. There are so many other things going on that could distract you from seeing the picture in its totality. I was definitely caught off guard. I was sinking quick and it wasn’t easy to get out. We had so many things tied up together that you find yourself making up excuses for why you are staying. Then you get to a point where you don’t even make excuses anymore.
(Participant F6)

Manipulation was the underlying theme being experienced by participants in this study based on their responses. Heterosexual male participants are faced with the challenge of maintaining a sense of masculinity while simultaneously engaging in an adverse power struggle with their female significant other. Controlling behaviors and intimidation appears to be some secondary behaviors that are experienced by participants as well. What also seems to be identifiable is that psychological abuse isn’t immediately noticed by participants in its initial stages.

Research Question 2

Participants in this study had a shared understanding that psychological abuse consists of manipulation. Psychological abuse is used as a control tactic. Psychological abuse can also have some elements of physical abuse as well. Control, intimidation and domination are secondary behaviors that occur within the realm of psychological abuse. It is the belief of participants that psychological abuse can occur independent of physical abuse. This is in line with prior research where psychological abuse and physical abuse can happen either inclusive or exclusive of each other (Beck et al., 2011; Follingstad & Edmundson, 2010).

It is also conceptualized that psychological abuse is acted out with maliciousness and harmful intent to maintain a sense of power over an individual (Follingstad & Edmundson, 2010). The need to control and dominate has been acknowledged by previous research as factors that have an underlying role in psychological abuse (Leisring, 2013). It appears that participants define and conceptualize psychological abuse already included in previous research.

Defining and understanding psychological abuse. Themes pertaining to how psychological abuse is defined and understood entail the understanding that it involves manipulation and intimidation towards an individual through controlling behaviors (see Table 2). This also includes physical acts of violence or threats of harm that only reinforces the psychological abuse that is being experienced to even a greater level.

Table 2

Most Common Behaviors Demonstrated by Participants' Female Significant Other

Emerging themes	Number of participants
-----------------	------------------------

Manipulation	18
Intimidation	18
Loss of respect	17
Threats of harm	15
Physical tactics	10
Low self-esteem	8
Loss of will	5

Definition and understanding of psychological abuse in this research study were considered by viewing participants' statements from their respective interviews.

Participants referenced seven emerging themes that they perceived would constitute as a solid foundation for understanding and defining psychological abuse. Themes such as manipulation, intimidation, loss of respect and threats of harm are descriptive behaviors most commonly used when participants were defining and understanding psychological abuse. For example, Participant E5 stated,

If someone is constantly degrading you it goes at your core. You try to hold on to your respect but you find yourself almost giving it away. Emotionally it is draining. You find yourself giving in when you should be fighting to hold on to your dignity.

This illustrates the theme of intimidation and loss of respect. Participant C3 also said,

I believe it is a lack of understanding when things have gone too far. You don't want to find yourself saying it but the emotional and controlling behaviors hit you hard. They leave deep scars in your mind. What happens when you're dealing with it it's like not always directly in your face. It is more like small jabs almost like boxing. It hits you one time you may not feel it as much but over a period of

time it slowly knocks you down. Eventually, you find yourself in a place where you thought you would never be.

This illustrates the dominant themes of loss of will and low self-esteem. Finally, Participant D4 said, "The emotional and verbal negative behavior is used to keep you in line. You feel like your manhood is being questioned. You stop responding in hopes that it would just end but it doesn't. It's constant, over and over attacking you" (Participant D4). This illustrates the underlying theme of physical tactics.

Among the six participants another common theme that developed was the relationship between physical abuse and psychological abuse. Each participant stated that at least at one point and time that physical violence occurred in relationship to psychological abuse. Twenty times references were made by participants to physical abuse. Four out of the six participants linked the relationship of physical abuse with psychological abuse. These four participants stated that physical abuse involves a great deal of psychological tactics. Participant F6 said,

Initially, you don't pay it any attention. It starts off with a slap here and a punch there but then it blows up where anything can be used a weapon or means of intimidation. You may not see the physical abuse as much but it now comes in the form of threats or the possibility of harm that may come to you. (Participant F6)

The other four participants stated that there were more occurrences of yelling and threats. It was more of an attack on one's emotions than anything else.

Participant E5 also said,

There were moments when physical stuff happened but I chalked it up to temper tantrums. I looked at the physical stuff as a build up to the emotional and verbal attacks that took place. Yeah, I got hit but I'm still a man. It's not like it was another man hitting on me so I dealt with it. Like I said the emotional and verbal baggage combined with the physical stuff was overbearing. (Participant E5)

This illustrates physical tactics proceeding psychological abuse.

There is some subjectivity involved when defining and understanding psychological abuse. Heterosexual male participants in this study defined psychological abuse with words such as manipulation, intimidation, threats of harm which could or could not involve physical tactics. These tactics can result in a loss of self-esteem and loss of will for the individual who is being victimized. Another consequence of psychological abuse is that it can leave an individual with deep emotional scars.

From these responses, overall there were behaviors that indicated psychological abuse themes and different types of themes, which can be used to help define psychological abuse.

Behaviors that indicated psychological abuse themes:

- Individuals experience manipulation when dealing with psychological abuse
- Physical abuse occurred with psychological abuse
- Psychological abuse takes a long time to recover from
- Psychological abuse is invisible to the naked eye
- Stigma is a huge part of why it is not discussed

Different types of psychological abuse themes:

- Both subtle and severe psychological abuse were experienced
- Subtle appeared to be more prevalent throughout the relationship
- Subtle moments of psychological abuse eventually led to severe psychological abuse

Defining psychological abuse:

- Psychological abuse involves both physical and psychological threats
- Psychological abuse entails berating and belittling someone emotionally
- Psychological abuse involves a cycle of constant manipulation
- Psychological abuse is pure intimidation
- Psychological abuse is taking someone's respect away from them

Research Question 3

Each participant viewed withholding intimacy as a severe form of psychological abuse. Each participant viewed threats of harm as a severe form of psychological abuse. This would fall in line with Control Theory where authoritative and controlling an individual within a relationship often relies on threats. It often relies on the use of aggression or the threats to use aggression to attain compliance from the vulnerable significant other. These behaviors such as threats and physical aggression are intended to restrict the vulnerable significant other from engaging in behavior that does not please the authoritative controlling individual (Fife & Schrager, 2012).

The following behaviors or psychological tactics such as manipulation, intimidation and controlling behaviors varied among participants as it pertains to either

being subtle or severe. Each of the participants in this study had a subjective view as it pertains to these behaviors. Context plays an important part in how a behavior is experienced by an individual. It can alter their interpretation of an incident (e.g., degree of psychological anguish, location of incident and events prior to the incident occurring. If the incident occurred in a public setting and whether the individual determines if the incident had any malice (Follingstad & Rogers, 2013).

Different types of psychological abuse tactics. It was referenced by nearly all the participants. “There are small occurrences that happen at first but then all of sudden its right there in your face, like boom, right there” (Participant A1). Additionally, all the participants mentioned that psychological abuse has some subjectivity. They stated that it depends on the individual on if the act is either subtle or severe (see Table 3).

Table 3

Types of Abuse Themes

Different types of psychological abuse	Subtle	Percentage of interviews mentioning theme			Total
		Severe	Yes	No	
Threats of harm	0%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Threats of withholding sex	0%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Manipulation	40%	60%	90%	10%	90%
Intimidation	30%	70%	80%	0%	80%
Controlling behaviors	50%	50%	50%	0%	50%
Loss of respect	60%	40%	40%	0%	40%

The following are different psychological abuse tactics experienced by participants. It describes their perceptions on whether the psychological abuse was subtle or severe. The table below summarizes how these psychological abuse tactics were perceived by participants in this study. Threats of harm and withholding sex were considered severe psychological abuse tactics while manipulation, intimidation, controlling behaviors and loss of respect varied among participants.

I don't think psychological abuse happens all at one time. There is a buildup. In the beginning its like something that can be easily overlooked. So like sex, in the beginning you use to be so loving but then now you're being told if you don't do a certain thing then you won't have sex. You find yourself doing those things whether you like it or not because you want to have sex. You lose respect for yourself. If the sex is good it helps you handle the crazy stuff. (Participant B2)

This illustrates how different types of psychological abuse can gradually move from subtle to severe.

Similar to previous statements made by participant B2 the underlying theme of psychological abuse taking a gradual affect from subtle to severe:

You don't sweat the small stuff. You look at it like why is she acting like that. Where is all this disrespect coming from. Then when it starts to hit you it's like damn what the hell is happening here. How the hell did it come to this. It went from once in a blue moon to like war every day, arguing almost every day, to the point you don't even know what the hell you're arguing about. (Participant D4)

Nearly all the participants made a reference to manipulation at being at the center when defining psychological abuse. Five out of the six participants made direct references using the word manipulation when defining and understanding psychological abuse. There is a common theme among participants of manipulation, intimidation and controlling behaviors when defining and understanding psychological abuse.

Psychological abuse had a direct impact on loss of self-esteem, loss of respect for one's self and to a degree loss of one's will. It would also suggest that some of the participants' sense of masculinity were significantly compromised or possibly suffered feelings of embarrassment directly related to the psychological abuse they experienced. This would point to the adverse effects of psychological abuse had on each participant's psychological state.

Application of control theory, social exchange and choice framework and narrative theory support the significance of participants' themes around their experiences with psychological abuse. Heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse are an overlooked population which requires more analysis. The findings from this particular study include many similar ideas found in previous studies.

Summary

This chapter provided results of this study that examined how heterosexual men experience psychological abuse. The three research questions revealed the lived experiences of these participants. Additionally, it also includes information as it pertains to recruitment and how this study identified heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. Results led to three prominent themes with underlying themes

supporting thematic findings. The overall results show that psychological abuse has an element of subjectivity and can vary how it is understood and viewed by heterosexual men.

In this chapter, the results of this research study are presented along with an introduction and summary of research questions. What is also included is the research setting, demographics, data collection, and data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. The men in this study were in varied relationships i.e. previously married, divorced, engaged and domestic relationships. Results of the study indicate that manipulation was an underlining theme when experiencing psychological abuse. Additionally, when defining psychological abuse there appears to be a power dynamic which could involve some physical violence. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The research objective was to provide an understanding of how heterosexual men define and view psychological abuse by examining their lived experiences. The purpose was to construct a composite description of the essence of lived experiences with psychological abuse along with how it is defined and viewed by heterosexual men. This chapter provides an interpretation of findings of this phenomenological study designed to explore the experiences of heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse. Data were collected from six participants who reported their respective experiences with psychological abuse. Data analysis revealed psychological abuse through the lens of heterosexual men and their lived experiences.

Findings resulted in themes of behaviors that heterosexual men have experienced with their female significant other. Themes also established which types of psychological abuse were experienced as well as how it was defined and understood. The findings of this study provide social change implications to addressing heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. Positive social change from this study can work toward establishing treatment approaches for heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse.

Interpretation of Findings

Participants in this study shared the following themes of manipulation, intimidation, and controlling behaviors that were significant to their definition and understanding of psychological abuse. Application of control theory, the social exchange

and choice framework, and narrative theory illuminated the significance of participant themes. Heterosexual men who have experienced psychological abuse is an overlooked population that requires more analysis. The findings in this study include ideas found in previous studies. Despite the limitation of this study's sample, which only included six participants, this study can provide a building block for further research as well as establish ideas for social work practice and treatment interventions.

The interpretation of findings is presented in the form of three research questions. The findings for the following research questions would cover heterosexual male victims' experiences with psychological abuse, defining and conceptualizing psychological abuse, and distinguishing between subtle and severe types of psychological abuse.

Experiences with Psychological Abuse

Research Question 1. How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse describe their experiences? The first objective of this study was to understand how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse describe their experiences. According to Participant B2, psychological abuse does not happen all at once. In the beginning there are small occurrences of verbal attacks and then it becomes apparent. Participant B2 reported that he was raised to always respect women no matter the circumstance, so violence was never an option. He found himself having a lot of internal restraint for an external issue. He knew that if he countered her actions, he would become the center of scrutiny not her.

Participants in this study who had direct experience with psychological abuse cited the following themes: the belief that psychological abuse entails manipulation, some

aspects of physical abuse, and a long time to recover; the belief that psychological abuse is not visible; the belief that heterosexual men deal with stigma that means they do not disclose; and the belief that excuses are used to reason why people do not initially recognize psychological abuse when it is happening to them.

Based on the results of this study, psychological abuse has a personal perspective, meaning it needs to be interpreted by the individual who is experiencing it at the time. Participant F6 stated that initially psychological abuse is something people do not pay attention to. Thus, psychological abuse may not be interpreted as such initially by heterosexual men. Additionally, there is a difference between how men and women identify psychological abuse when they initially experience it. Therefore, a definition of psychological abuse for heterosexual men from themes in this study needs to incorporate subjectivity by individuals who do not initially recognize this phenomenon when it is happening to them. It may also need to incorporate a cultural perspective.

Defining psychological abuse based on descriptions is further complicated there is the stigma for heterosexual men, which caused participants in this study to not disclose this victimization or experiences. This creates a larger concern because heterosexual men who are suffering from this phenomenon may continue to endure it. Stigma also creates a barrier when defining psychological abuse because the details of victimization or experiences are not initially disclosed. In this study, participants reasoned or denied their initial experiences with psychological abuse. For example, Participants D4 and E5 reasoned their initial experiences with psychological abuse as temper tantrums and anger issues. Participant D4 acknowledged his initial experience of psychological abuse as a

sign of disrespect to him. However, initial experiences of psychological abuse like these with heterosexual men does not discount it as psychological abuse even when not interpreted as such.

Defining and Conceptualizing Psychological Abuse

Research Question 2. How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse define and conceptualize it? The second objective of this research was to understand how heterosexual men define and view psychological abuse. The themes that arose from interviews signified that participants had a diverse view on this issue. The themes that shared some commonality among participants provided insight into their perspective about psychological abuse.

Themes of manipulation were the most prevalent of the interviews conducted and occurred with more frequency. Themes of intimidation were secondary where participants implied there were incidents of intimidation that they experienced while providing their narratives during interviews. Physical abuse was prevalent among 50% of participants; however, each participant encountered an experience with physical abuse. The other 50% of participants did not view physical abuse as significant when they encountered it.

Participant F6 summarized the relationship with physical abuse and psychological abuse:

Initially, you don't pay it any attention. It starts off with a slap here and a punch there but then it blows up where anything can be used as a weapon or means of

intimidation. You may not see the physical abuse as much but it now comes in the form of threats or the possibility of harm that may come to you.

This response points to the idea that physical abuse can be overlooked from the male perspective because psychological abuse can be so prevalent. But physical abuse still affects heterosexual men, as it can be used as a psychological tactic by their female significant other as a form of intimidation. Participant E5 expressed that psychological abuse in combination with physical abuse was overbearing. Taking this perspective along with previous research shows that heterosexual men can overlook physical abuse but when psychological abuse is prevalent it can still diminish resiliency (Beck et al., 2011).

When addressing Research Question 2, several common themes emerged. Nearly all the participants learned to adapt and deal with psychological abuse over a respective period. They all had specific reasons on why they remained in the relationship. For some it was for the children, for others it was intimacy while others had financial tie-ins with their significant other. Many hoped that their circumstances would have changed and withheld from disclosing their situation to avoid stigma. One of the main reasons for many of these participants for not disclosing their circumstances earlier was in fear of no one believing them. There was also some internalization that took place where some questioned why they allowed themselves to overlook the warning signs. Many dealt with this internalization because they did not want others to blame them as if it were their fault for the psychological abuse occurring.

Some participants described feelings of loss of will or loss of respect. They pointed to feelings of being caught in a cycle and not knowing how to get out of it. All

participants agreed that individuals on the outside would not understand what they were dealing with. Feelings of having their will stripped affected how they viewed themselves as men. Many of the participants in this study did not view themselves as victims of psychological abuse. The view that psychological abuse is not as significant with heterosexual men explains why heterosexual men are hesitant to disclose what is happening with them. The participants who experienced psychological abuse by their female significant other found their partners deflecting the responsibility of abuse, which also caused them not to disclose their experiences.

Psychological abuse is a phenomenon that takes place over time. Each individual has their personal perspective when they experience psychological abuse. There are experiences that happen where some would not consider it psychological abuse while others would. There are those who experience physical abuse in conjunction with psychological abuse but consider the later to be more prevalent of an issue. Previous studies have supported the relationship with psychological abuse and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (Mauritz, Goossens, Draijer & van Achterberg, 2013). Prior studies have also supported the theme that psychological abuse entails a personal perspective. Dehart and Follingstad (2010) argued that situation and personal perception of psychological abuse has a significant impact on how an individual understands the phenomenon. Additionally, Follingstad and Edmundson (2010) argued that physical abuse is a significant component of psychological abuse.

Controlling behaviors have also been supported by previous studies as one of the underlining factors for individuals who experience psychological abuse by their

significant other (Leisring, 2013). Participants in this study used some of the same language used in previous studies when defining psychological abuse. Some of the participants in this study reported not recognizing psychological abuse when it initially occurred. Others have reasoned with not recognizing psychological abuse when it initially occurred to other underlining behaviors (Varia, Abidin, & Dass, 1996).

From this perspective psychological abuse directly and indirectly affects one's emotional state. The constant negative encounters, arguments with their female significant other show to have a significant impact on other aspects of these participants' lives. The constant threats or possibility of threats and cycle of manipulation appeared to have provoked a sense of impossibility. When experiencing psychological abuse there could be the prevalence of depression and anxiety as well. The perception of not feeling like they can leave their present circumstances have led to the aspect of impossibility experienced by these participants.

Different Types of Psychological Abuse

Research Question 3. How do heterosexual male victims who experience psychological abuse distinguish the differences between subtle and severe psychological abuse? The third and final objective of this study was to understand how heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse distinguish between subtle and severe psychological abuse. The following themes emerged when analyzing different types of psychological abuse: threats of harm, threats of withholding sex, manipulation, intimidation, controlling behaviors and loss of respect. In this study, participants acknowledged that threats of harm and threats of withholding sex are severe types of

psychological abuse. Behaviors such as controlling behaviors and loss of respect were seen as subtle types of psychological abuse. The majority of participants, 60% to 70% stated manipulation and intimidation were viewed as severe types of psychological abuse.

All participants at one point in this study reported at least one of these types of psychological abuse. In previous research types of psychological abuse such as manipulation, intimidation and controlling behaviors have also been reported by female victims as well. Research from this study reflect different types of psychological abuse stemming from heterosexual men's experiences. However, this is a small sample size and the types of psychological abuse that occur need to be determined how often it happens over the course of a relationship. It would be difficult to determine if this sample is reflective of the experiences of heterosexual men across the United States.

Discussion of Theories

The theoretical perspectives chosen for this study were Control Theory, Social Exchange and Choice Framework and Narrative Theory. Control theory explains the power and control within a relationship. Behaviors such as manipulation, intimidation, threats of harm and withholding sex were used by female significant other towards their heterosexual male partners. It also identifies how these participants adapted to various types of psychological abuse and avoided challenging their female significant other possibly became overwhelming (Fife & Schrage, 2012).

Social exchange and choice framework explains how individuals rationalize their self-interests by analyzing their risks and rewards. Participant B2 specifically stated how sex was reason why he remained in the relationship. Many of the participants did not

recognize themselves as victims because they weighed the rewards against the risks.

There is also a sequence of power and decision-making that occur as well. The power lied with their female significant other and these men were reliant upon them for various reasons (Karakurt & Silver, 2013).

Narrative theory focuses on how the individual and how the individual place significance on their issues. Heterosexual men in this study reflected how they were seen and how their experiences influenced choices in their respective relationships. In context it provides an account for how heterosexual men can allow themselves to endure psychological abuse. Also, it shows how some heterosexual men eventually rejected enduring psychological abuse. Participant E5 is a good example. He found himself slowly accepting psychological abuse and then came to a point where he had endured enough and didn't want to deal with it any longer. Narrative theory offers an explanation about the effects of psychological abuse as being fixed and as a phenomenon that is endured as opposed to punishment (Hall, 2014).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study begin with generalizability. Individuals in this study were from the state of Texas. They represented from an ethnicity standpoint African American, Caucasian, Mexican American and Afro-Latino. Although there was some diversity in this study it would provide greater depth to confirm generalizability if this study was expanded to different parts of the United States. Ultimately, these findings may not be applicable to the greater population of heterosexual men in the United States.

Purposive sampling was used for this research which could limit generalizability. Both Chapters one and three described how purposive sampling was used to identify data of heterosexual men who may have experienced psychological abuse (Nastasi, 2011a). This study recognizes the concerns of generalizability of the qualitative phenomenological approach, the primary objective was to understand how heterosexual men describe, define and view their experiences with psychological abuse. This research has provided a unique perspective of psychological abuse through the lens of heterosexual male victims.

Additionally, social desirability could have been another limitation. Consideration needs to be taken into account that participants could have provided more socially acceptable responses as oppose to more straightforward disclosures. Participants may have perceived that they wanted to view themselves in a positive light so this could have affected some of their answers. Triangulation was used to ensure validity and credibility of interpretations and to reduce bias. In addition, findings of this research are significant to future research in understanding how heterosexual men describe, define and view psychological abuse.

Recommendations

There are four recommendations based on the results on this study. These results are general as oppose to specific. The nature of this study was focused on understanding how heterosexual men describe, define and view their experiences with psychological abuse. More research is required for this topic of heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. However, heterosexual men are victims of psychological abuse and

themes such as manipulation, intimidation and controlling behaviors were prevalent in this study.

Heterosexual men who are victims of psychological abuse needs to be taken seriously and provided sufficient treatment and interventions. The first recommendation is for licensed practitioners who specialize in treating psychological abuse. Future studies may work to establish treatment and intervention programs that specifically target heterosexual men. Treatment and intervention programs may hopefully reduce stigma and stereotypes that are associated with heterosexual men. Most of all heterosexual men may feel more empowered to disclose.

The second recommendation would be to identify how to incorporate services for heterosexual male victims of psychological abuse with similar services for female victims. There are some services which could be provided post-treatment that could be beneficial. These services would be general in context and work to empower instead of isolate. It is likely that some services can have a significant impact when they are successfully integrated while some services need to remain gender-specific.

The third recommendation is for one-to-one or group support. This is where licensed practitioners who specialize in treating psychological abuse would find supportive outlets. Where heterosexual men who are engaging in counseling services can attach themselves to other heterosexual men who have successfully overcome psychological abuse. Future studies can consider the significance of one-to-one or group support to identify how helpful it is to adjust to life after experiencing psychological abuse.

The fourth and final recommendation is for licensed practitioners to specialize in treating heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This would be significant for ethnically diverse heterosexual men who may experience this phenomenon. Thus, future research can consider identifying how specialization in treating heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse can enhance or predict positive therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, specialization targeting heterosexual men may affect the individual directly by improving their overall well-being and ways to confront future issues after experiencing psychological abuse.

Implications for Social Change

This study provides some possible insights for social change. The themes participants emphasized significantly are manipulation, intimidation and controlling behaviors. These themes have a strong relationship with psychological abuse and the subjectivity of interpretation are significantly relevant. License practitioners, law enforcement and policy makers should be keenly aware not to define psychological abuse for heterosexual men as to diminish their experiences. Additionally, heterosexual men can be just as complex and helpless as their female counterparts when they experience psychological abuse. Adjusting both perspective and clinical definition for both clinical and legal purposes should leave room for flexibility as well as cultural subjectivity.

Conclusions

This study worked to identify the experiences of heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. This was done by using a phenomenological research design. Findings in this study provided the essence of circumstances that have adversely

affected them. Additionally, findings have also shown information about how heterosexual men describe, define and understand this phenomenon.

With these findings it may generate goals that would lead to additional research as well as providing a larger medium for this demographic to be heard about their experiences with this phenomenon. Results from this research can hopefully be used to provide treatment strategies for heterosexual men who experience psychological abuse. The social change implications of this study can affect future research participants, establishing treatment programs and intervention for heterosexual men who may have experienced psychological abuse.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date:

Location:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

Interview

I am interested in studying psychological abuse in men who say they have experienced it. And today, I am interested in hearing your experiences of it and how you would define it. So, I have a few questions for you.

1. First, can you describe the experience or experiences that led you to first believe that you were dealing with psychological abuse from your partner?
2. When hearing the words “psychological abuse” what does this mean to you if you had to define it?
3. How would you describe the behavior(s) of your partner that led you to believe you were dealing with psychological abuse?
4. Have you experienced different types of psychological abuse? Can you describe them?
5. How did you feel as man as a result of experiencing psychological abuse?
6. Please provide a narrative (brief history) summary of your life as your experienced psychological abuse?

Demographic Information

Age

1. 18 – 24 _____
2. 25 – 34 _____
3. 35 – 40 _____

Ethnicity:

1. White _____
2. Hispanic or Latino _____
3. Black or African American _____
4. Native American or American Indian _____
5. Asian/Pacific Islander _____
6. Other _____

Education:

1. Some High School, no diploma _____
2. High School graduate or GED _____
3. Some College credit, no degree _____
4. Trade/technical/vocational training _____
5. Associate Degree _____
6. Bachelor's Degree _____
7. Master's Degree _____
8. Professional Degree _____
9. Doctorate Degree _____

Children in the Home:

1. Under 5 years old _____
2. Under 12 years old _____
3. Under 18 years old _____
4. None _____

Household Composition:

1. Single, never married _____
2. Married or Domestic partnership _____
3. Divorced _____
4. Separated _____

Length of Relationship:

1. Less than 2 years _____
2. Between 2 – 4 years _____
3. Between 5 – 7 years _____
4. Between 8 – 10 years _____
5. More than 10 years _____

Employment Status:

1. Employed (salary) ____
2. Self-Employed ____
3. Out of work less than 6 months ____
4. Out of work more than 6 months ____
5. Student ____
6. Retired ____