

“YOU’RE A BOSS AND SHE TREATED YOU LIKE YOU WERE A BITCH”: A
QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY ADOLESCENT
FATHERS’ EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
BY THE MOTHERS OF THEIR CHILDREN

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science
with a Major in Family and Child Studies
August 2015

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DEDICATION

For all the fathers who shared their stories with me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to all my family, friends, and professors who have provided me with encouragement and support during my time as a graduate student at Texas State University. Additional thanks to my mother, Danette Bermea; Ronessa McDonald; and Dr. Norma Perez-Brena for taking the time to read this and contribute their invaluable suggestions.

Second, thank you to the *Strengthening Relationships/Strengthening Families* program facilitators, Renee Perez and Eddie Reyes, for taking the time to arrange interviews with all the fathers in this study. This would have been impossible without you.

Finally, thank you to the best thesis committee I could have asked for. The unique expertise of each member of my committee allowed me to grow as a student and a researcher. Your support every step of the way was incredible, and I could not have asked for more. A special thanks to Dr. Michelle Toews for being with me since I was an undergraduate as well as being my boss, thesis chair, and mentor through graduate school, even postponing a move across the country until I successfully defended this thesis. I could not imagine having a better experience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is currently a dearth of research on males as victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), despite findings suggesting over a quarter of American men have been physically assaulted, stalked, or raped by a romantic partner in their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011) and almost half of all men have reported being emotionally abused by a partner (Black et al., 2011). IPV is particularly prevalent during the adolescent years, with one study reporting rates up to two times higher at this stage of development (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007). Moreover, because research has found adolescent females are just as likely as (O’Leary, Slep, Avery-Leaf & Cascardi, 2008; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014) if not more likely than (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Capaldi et al., 2007; Sears, Byers & Price, 2007), their male partners to perpetrate IPV, adolescent males are at a heightened risk of experiencing IPV. This risk might be further exacerbated for adolescent fathers given the heightened risk for stress during adolescent pregnancy and parenthood (Huang, Costeines, Kaufman, & Ayala, 2014). Even though there is an increased risk for male IPV victimization during this developmental stage, particularly for adolescent fathers (Moore, Florsheim, & Butner, 2007), there is a scarcity of research on this topic. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the experiences of adolescent fathers who are the victims of IPV in their relationships.

Theoretical Foundations

Social Learning Theory

Across the course of development, people learn from the behaviors of those around them (Bandura & Huston, 1961). Social learning theory is a commonly cited

theory explaining IPV (Ali & Naylor, 2013). This theory proposes children imitate the behaviors of those close to them (Bandura & Huston, 1961). To illustrate, children may learn aggressive, even violent behaviors, from other aggressive individuals in a child's life (Bandura & Huston, 1961; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). By repeatedly witnessing violence in the family of origin, children come to accept violent behaviors as acceptable, or even normative (Bandura et al., 1961). As a result, children will be more likely to use violence or aggressive behaviors in their own social interactions as they grow up (Bandura et al., 1961; Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010). Social learning theory can also explain the acceptability of violence not only in adult family members (Bandura & Huston, 1961), but among peers as well (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991). It is also possible to learn the acceptability of victimization from families of origin in which violence occurs (Conchran, Sellers, Wiesbrock, & Palacios, 2011; Tyler, Brownridge, & Melander, 2011). Additionally, although research on the application of social learning theory towards IPV is typically shown through learning violent behaviors (Cohran et al., 2011; Fritz, Slep, & O'Leary, 2012), some research has supported the idea of young boys learning to be nonaggressive from individuals who model nonaggression (Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009).

Social learning theory also provides a framework to understand the development of gender identity and gender roles (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), as it proposes children learn what it means to be a member of their gender based on the behaviors of others (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Gender identity is also formed through others' reactions to their behaviors from a very early age (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In this way, children learn what is acceptable, and are more likely to repeat those behaviors, as well as what is

unacceptable, and are less likely to repeat those behaviors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

How children's gender identity classifications are manifested over the course of development is further explained by Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981).

Gender Schema Theory and the Gender Intensification Hypothesis

Given children experience messages in their environment regarding what it means to be a member of their gender, it is important to note how adolescents internalize messages regarding gender identity. A possible explanation is offered by Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981). According to Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), gender is commonly viewed as a dichotomy, either completely masculine or entirely feminine. As individuals pursue the development of their own self-concept, they are faced with pressure to conform to either an entirely masculine or entirely feminine identity (Bem, 1981). According to this theory, gender is viewed in our culture as mutually exclusive, and failure to adhere to what are commonly masculine or feminine characteristics leads to discord (Bem, 1981). Additionally, masculinity and femininity are not only viewed as separate identities, they are often perceived as being irreconcilable and at odds with each other (Baber & Tucker, 2006). Individuals who hold this schema of men and women as possessing intrinsically different roles in society perceive those who violate those roles as not being masculine or feminine, respectively (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Bem, 1981).

Although these gender role expectations are conveyed to children early in life (Bem, 1981), adolescent fathers are more likely to conform to these stereotypes (Hill & Lynch, 1983). According to the Gender Intensification Hypothesis (Hill & Lynch, 1983), during adolescence, youth feel the high pressure from peers and adults to adhere to expected gender norms (Alfieri, Ruble, & Higgins, 1996; Galambos & Almeida, 1990).

Additionally, because masculinity holds a greater value in Western culture, adolescent males undergoing this intensification are more likely to resist roles or characteristics that might cause others to perceive them as feminine than they are to engage in less stereotypically masculine behaviors (Galambos & Almeida, 1990). Applying this to IPV, men are frequently expected to be able to overpower and control their female partners (Hodell, Wasarhaley, Lynch, & Golding, 2014); thus failure to do so is considered a source of shame, as it is considered feminine (Sears, Byers, Whelan, Saint-Pierre, & the Dating Violence Research Team, 2006).

According to the Gender Intensification Hypothesis (1983), during adolescence, adolescents' perceptions of what it means to be a member of their gender becomes more traditional. As a result, more stereotypical expectations regarding gender identity become salient in the adolescent's identity schemas (Hill & Lynch, 1983). A proposed explanation is that as heterosexual adolescents enter late adolescence, they begin embarking on more adult relationships in which they feel more gender-stereotyped roles are expected of them (Alfieri et al., 1996). As adolescent parents are embarking on a developmental milestone typically reserved for adults (Holcombe et al., 2009), adolescent parents are gaining adult responsibilities. Therefore, adolescent fathers who have created stereotyped, dichotomous views of their masculine identities (Bem, 1981) are likely to adhere to those ideals even more rigidly in adolescence (Hill & Lynch, 1983).

Problem Statement

Although violence against adolescent mothers is a concern, adolescent fathers as victims of IPV is also a salient problem (Black et al., 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). In fact, some research has found high rates of mutually perpetrated violence in adolescent

parent relationships (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). Moreover, female perpetrated IPV is more socially sanctioned than male perpetrated IPV (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell et al., 2014; Sears et al., 2006). Due to these norms pertaining to the meaning of gender and violence, as well as the increased adherence to gender roles during adolescence (Hill & Lynch, 1985), further research is needed to investigate what messages adolescent fathers receive about the meaning of female perpetrated IPV.

Despite the empirical findings establishing adolescent fathers as the victims of IPV in their relationships (Newman & Campbell, 2010; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014), no research exists examining the experiences of these fathers and their perceptions of victimization. In order to contribute to add to the limited body of knowledge pertaining to IPV victimization among adolescent fathers, the present study seeks to uncover the commonalities in this population's experiences in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding. Given the adherence to masculine gender roles in the lives of male adolescents (Galambos & Almeida, 1990; Hill & Lynch, 1983), the present study will examine these experiences through the influence of traditional gender roles. Additionally, family and peer perceptions of male victimization of IPV will be taken into account, given the influence of both groups on adolescents' acceptance of victimization (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004).

Research Questions

Given the gaps in current literature hindering a comprehensive knowledge of how adolescent fathers perceive and experience victimization of IPV in their relationships, the present study seeks to understand the immediate and cultural factors shaping these experiences. In-depth interviews were used to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do adolescent fathers experience IPV victimization?

Research Question 2: What messages do adolescent fathers receive about males being victims of female-perpetrated IPV?

Research Question 3: How do these messages influence adolescent fathers' experiences and perceptions of being victims of female-perpetrated IPV?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a paucity of research on adolescent fathers as victims of IPV. Due to the unique circumstances faced by adolescent parents (Holcombe, Peterson, & Manlove, 2009), the complex, multifaceted nature of IPV (Johnson, 1995; Pence & Paymar, 1993), and the social influences of traditional gender roles (Bem, 1981; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Hill & Lynch 1983), reaching an understanding of this issue requires a thorough examination of the various aspects involved. This review of the literature examines adolescent parenthood, experiences of IPV through the lens of gender, as well as intersections of race and masculinity.

Adolescent Parenthood

The United States has the highest adolescent birth rate of all the industrialized nations, despite a decrease since the early 1990s (Holcombe et al., 2009) with the lowest adolescent birth rate since 1945 in 2012 (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Curtin, & Mathews, 2013). However, in spite of this decrease, in 2012, 29.4 of every 1,000 births in the United States were to adolescent mothers and 13.8 of every 1,000 births were to adolescent fathers, ages 15-19 (Martin et al., 2013). Adolescent pregnancy and parenthood often result in a number of adverse outcomes. For example, adolescent parents are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers who delay childbearing (Holcombe et al., 2009; Mollborn, 2010). Those who do graduate, typically require increased social and economic resources in order to do so (Futris, Olmstead, Pasley, & Nielson, 2012; Mollborn, 2007). They are also more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status (SES) and receive government benefits than individuals who have

children in adulthood (Holcombe et al., 2009). Pregnant adolescents are also at a higher risk for depression than adult women experiencing a developmentally on-time pregnancy (Siegel & Brandon, 2014). Additionally, just as adolescent mothers are at an increased risk for depression (Huang et al., 2014), adolescent fathers are also at an increased risk for depression compared to fathers who have delayed childbearing (Lee, Fagan, & Chen, 2011). Adolescent parents are also at an increased risk for repeat pregnancies during adolescence, with about one-fifth of all adolescent births being to a primi- or multiparous mother (Holcombe et al., 2009).

Intimate Partner Violence

In the United States it is estimated about a quarter of all men have experienced some form of physical IPV, sexual violence, or stalking in their lives, with over 90% of those men experiencing physical violence alone (Black et al., 2011). Of those who experience some form of IPV, over half of them reported that these experiences occurred before the age of 25 (Black et al., 2011). Contrary to research on adult populations, which find females in relationships with men experience the highest rates of victimization (Reno, Marcus, Leary, & Samuels, 2000), research finds similar rates of IPV among adolescent males and females (e.g. Capaldi et al., 2007; Mulford & Giordano, 2008; O'Leary et al., 2008; Sears et al., 2007; Swahn, Simon, Arias, & Bossarte, 2008). These rates have also been seen to extend into the relationships of adolescent parents (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). However, similar to research on adult heterosexual couples, male adolescents are more likely to injure their partner using physical violence than females (Capaldi et al., 2007; Swahn et al., 2008).

Although some females who perpetrate IPV against male partners do so in self-defense (Caldwell, Swan, Allen, Sullivan, & Snow, 2009), others report doing so out of anger (Caldwell et al., 2009; Leisring, 2013; O’Leary et al., 2008), in retaliation (Leisring, 2013; O’Leary et al. 2008), and for issues related to control, either to control their partner or to have their partner stop controlling them (Caldwell et al., 2009).

Another factor associated with female perpetration of IPV is the inability to effectively communicate with their partner (Leisring, 2013; Toews et al., 2011). These descriptions of motivations for perpetration closely mirror those given by males (Johnson, 1995).

In addition to physical abuse, almost half of all men in the United States have experienced some form of emotional abuse (Black et al., 2011). Emotional abuse is typically defined as the use of put-downs, belittling, and name-calling, while deliberately making the partner feel guilty, crazy, or humiliated (Pence & Paymar, 1993). In addition, making threats and deliberately intimidating a partner, as well as isolating the victim and minimizing his/her feelings and experiences of abuse all fall under this definition (Pence & Paymar, 1993). In adolescent relationships, emotional abuse is a prevalent control tactic utilized by females (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Turner, 2012; Newton & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014).

Although often thought of as less severe (Hodell et al., 2014), physical and emotional abuse are not without consequences to the health or quality of life for the young men who are victimized (Black et al., 2011). Males who experience physical violence report a decrease in mental and physical health (Black et al., 2011). Common physical ailments reported by males who have experienced this form of IPV include chronic pain and frequent headaches (Black et al., 2011). They also reported trouble

sleeping, as well as a difficulty engaging in various activities (Black et al., 2011). Additionally, males who experience both physical and emotional IPV report decreases in their relationship satisfaction (Shorey, Febres, Brasfield, & Stuart, 2012), as well as increased rates of depression (Reingle, Jennings, Connell, Businelle, & Chartier, 2014) and PTSD, similar to the rates reported by female victims (Shorey et al., 2012). These consequences are especially prevalent if emotional abuse was utilized in addition to the physical abuse (Shorey et al., 2012). Therefore, the societal notion that female abuse, either physical or emotional, is innocuous and less damaging to male victims (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Sears et al., 2006) is not supported by the literature.

Almost 10% of adolescents have experienced physical IPV, with Hispanic and Black adolescents at an increased risk (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). To illustrate, 19.5% of Hispanic adolescents have experienced some form of IPV, while 14.8% reported emotional violence and 6.6% reported experiencing physical violence (National Institute of Justice, 2011). Additionally, in a study of a population in which 96% of the sample was Black, 52% reported experiencing emotional violence, while 46% reported experiencing physical violence (Nicodemus, Porter, & Davenport, 2011).

The rates of IPV in adolescent parent relationships are typically even higher than they are in the general adolescent population. In a study of 83 pregnant and parenting majority Hispanic adolescent females, 84% reported perpetrating at least one abusive act on her partner, with 56% perpetrating physical violence and 40% reporting their partner had perpetrated physical violence against them (Newman & Campbell, 2011). Additionally, 84% reported perpetrating emotional violence, while 80% reported their

partner had perpetrated emotional violence against them (Newman & Campbell, 2011). A similar study of 278 pregnant and parenting Latina adolescents found similar rates of perpetration (Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). Approximately 48% of these mothers had perpetrated physical violence, while 86% had perpetrated emotional violence (Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). Conversely, 17% reported their partner had perpetrated physical violence, and 71% reported their partner had perpetrated psychological violence against them (Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). These rates of violence are especially concerning for young parents, as adolescent mothers are often the gatekeepers of their children, and a negative relationship can impact the father's ability to be involved (Herzog, Umaña-Taylor, Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2007).

As illustrated above, mutually perpetrated violence is commonly seen in adolescent relationships in which IPV is present (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Newman & Campbell, 2011; O'Leary et al., 2008; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). This has been attributed to lack of positive communication skills, especially in adolescent couples (Newman & Campbell, 2011). Relationship education programs have aided adolescent mothers' abilities to resolve conflicts in healthy ways that do not lead to violent encounters with their partners (Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Turner, 2012; Toews & Yazedjian, 2010; Toews et al., 2011). It is recommended these interventions occur early in life, so children are equipped to respectfully navigate healthy relationships as they enter adolescence (Black et al., 2011). Additionally, relationships skills programs are recommended for pregnant and expectant adolescents in order to improve the quality of transition to parenthood (Moore et al., 2007).

Stress brought on by family, friends, school, or personal health has also been seen as a risk factor for IPV in adolescent relationships, especially in the case of males (Chen & Foshee, 2014). As adolescent parenting is a stressful life event that impacts not only the adolescent parent's mental wellbeing (Huang, et al., 2014), but heightens the overall family stress level and can increase family conflict (East & Chien, 2013), it should be considered a prevalent risk factor for IPV in the lives of adolescent parents. Adolescent parents are placed at an additional risk for IPV victimization as they may find it difficult to communicate this stress given the low communication abilities that exist in this developmental stage (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2010; Toews et al., 2011).

Messages about Gender and Violence

Additional factors that place adolescent parents at a heightened risk for experiencing IPV take place in their families of origin and peer groups. Adolescents who come from homes where IPV occurs are more likely to experience victimization in their own relationships (Hamby et al., 2012; Tyler et al., 2011). There is also a heightened risk for those exposed to IPV to become perpetrators (Ali & Naylor, 2013). This has commonly been attributed to the acceptance of violence as a relationship strategy being modeled in the family of origin (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Franklin & Kercher, 2012). Additionally, children who have been the victims of neglect in their families of origin are at an increased risk to perpetrate IPV (Renner & Whitney, 2013; Widom, Czaja, & Dutton, 2013).

Peers also influence male adolescent fathers (Arriaga & Foshee, 2014). For instance, adolescent males who are the victims of IPV are more likely to be friends with

other males who are also victims of female perpetrated IPV (Arriaga & Foshee, 2014). In fact, adolescent males who spent time with a peer who was a victim were more likely to be victims than adolescent males who did not, even if they did experience IPV in their families of origin, indicating the influence the peer group has on the adolescent (Arriaga & Foshee, 2014). Given that during adolescence peer groups tend to be more influential than the family, the adolescent is likely to incorporate his peers' views (Brown & Larson, 2009).

Although the influence of those in the adolescent father's social circle is important in the perceptions and experiences of adolescent fathers' victimization of IPV (Arriaga & Foshee, 2014; Black et al., 2010; Brown & Larson, 2009), cultural definitions of gender are also crucial in the understanding of gender and violence (Bem, 1981). These cultural depictions of gender roles are commonly presented as a gender dichotomy, as elaborated on in Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981). This schema (Bem, 1981), as well as the beliefs in this dichotomy that strengthen during adolescence (Hill & Lynch, 1981), affect how IPV is perceived in our culture, especially by the adolescents who experience it (Sears et al., 2006). Males are expected to be dominant in interpersonal relationships (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006) and are thought to possess the ability to defend themselves from a physical attack from a female (Hodell et al., 2014). To be victimized by a female partner is a source of embarrassment (Sears et al., 2006).

Specifically in Hispanic culture, masculinity is often represented in a similar way, as illustrated by the concept of Machismo (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracy, 2008). It is typically described in the family setting as males being dominant over their female partners and children (Arciniega et al., 2008) and characterized by low levels

of paternal involvement due to strict adherence to traditional gender roles (Glass & Owen, 2010). According to Gender Schema Theory, if these men are not exhibiting traditionally masculine characteristics, they are considered feminine (Bem, 1981). Given that masculinity is assigned greater value in our culture, those adolescent men who experience this dichotomy often wish to separate themselves from what they conceive to be feminine (Galambos & Almeida, 1990). Therefore, it is possible that this gender dichotomy may be increased for adolescents exposed to these ideas.

In contrast with traditional Machismo, a more egalitarian perspective of masculinity, Caballerismo, is also present in Hispanic cultures (Arciniega et al., 2008). It is a more nurturing and emotionally expressive masculine identity (Arciniega et al., 2008). Additionally, it is more family focused (Glass & Owen, 2010) and emphasizes responsibility (Ojeda & Liang, 2014). Although little research exists comparing Machismo with Caballerismo, it is possible that, due to the more sensitive nature of Caballerismo (Arciniega et al., 2008), there is less adherence to these traditional gender roles. However, it is important to note that, despite an increase in emotionality in Caballerismo compared to Machismo, the male is often considered the head of a family by both (Arciniega, 2008).

Overall, cultural attitudes about female perpetrated physical IPV towards male victims in heterosexual relationships dictate that this practice is less problematic and is more accepted overall (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). For example, a commonly cited perception of this form of violence is that women who commit IPV are doing so in self-defense against a violent male partner and, therefore, are not to blame their actions (Emery, 2009; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell, et al., 2014; Rhatigan, Stewart, &

Moore, 2011). This is especially true if an argument took place to instigate or exacerbate the violence (Rhatigan et al., 2011; Hodell et al., 2014). Even if the argument itself was not violent, victim blaming by external parties was more likely to occur if the victim had consumed alcohol prior to the initiation of the argument or if the victim had been unfaithful (Rhatigan et al., 2011). Although people are more likely to place the blame on the victim in the case of both male and female victimization, they are more likely to do so if the victim is male (Rhatigan et al., 2011).

Stereotypical gender roles that dictate males should be dominant in their relationships, as illustrated by Machismo (Arciniega et al., 2008), aids in perpetuating the belief that females cannot be perpetrators and men cannot be victims of IPV (Rhatigan, Stewart, & Moore, 2011; Hodell, et al., 2014; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Emery, 2010). There is the common misconception in our society that because men tend to be physically larger, they tend to be stronger and much more capable of overpowering a female partner than a female partner would be at overpowering a male (Hodell et al., 2014). As a result, male perpetrated violence is seen as more of a concern than female perpetrated violence (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell et al., 2014; Rhatigan et al., 2011). In other words, because of their size, men are seen as more threatening and more capable of inflicting serious damage than a woman (Hamby & Jackson, 2010). To illustrate, when a man cites self-defense as a cause for IPV, he is less likely to be recognized as a victim than a female (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell et al., 2014). Adolescents are not immune to these perceptions, which are reflected in their own relationships (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Sears et al., 2006). Despite these findings, research has indicated that both men and women believe female perpetrated violence is not as serious as male perpetrated violence

(Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell et al., 2014; Rhatigan et al., 2011). Because this social norm is so strong, many men who are the victims of violence fail to report their experiences because they do not wish to be perceived as either weak or abusive (Emery, 2010).

Summary

Overall, the challenges faced by adolescent parents (Holcombe et al., 2009) as they navigate the formation of their gender identities (Bem, 1981; Hill & Lynch, 1983) might impact the experiences of adolescent fathers' IPV victimization. Those closest to the adolescent father have the ability to influence their perceptions about IPV (Bandura, 1977). In addition, cultural gender norms have the ability to impact these perceptions and experiences (Bem, 1981). To illustrate, although female perpetrated violence often occurs in adolescent relationships (Swahn et al., 2008), it may not be taken as a serious threat (Sears et al., 2006). Although some studies have examined the experiences of IPV in adolescent parent relationships (Moore et al., 2007; O'Leary et al., 2008), few studies have examined the experiences through the lens of female perpetrated IPV (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). As fatherhood and family plays an important role (Fleck, Hudson, Abbott, Reisbig, 2013; Glass & Owen, 2010), and fathers' access to children is often reliant on the quality of the parental relationship (Fleck et al., 2013; Herzog et al., 2007; Perry & Langley, 2013), it is important to examine female perpetrated IPV specifically in the context of adolescent fatherhood.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Adolescent fathers are at an increased risk to be the victims of intimate partner violence (Moore et al., 2007); yet, to date, there is a dearth of research on this topic. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine adolescent fathers' experiences with female-perpetrated IPV and how these experiences are influenced by gender norms (Bem, 1981), which tend to become cemented during adolescence (Hill & Lynch, 1983). In order to fully examine the complexity of these experiences, qualitative methodology was utilized to examine the narratives shared by the adolescent fathers participating in this study.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 12 adolescent fathers living in Central Texas. They ranged in age from 16 to 18, with a mean age of 16.8 years. One participant identified as Black, one identified as half Native American and half Hispanic, and ten identified as Hispanic. All participants spoke English fluently and were able to effectively communicate with the interviewer. Of the 12 participants, 11 had a child and one participant's partner was pregnant. Of the fathers whose children had already been born, the average age of the children was 8.5 months. At the time of the interviews, eight were still in a relationship with the mother of their child. The mean length of the relationships at the time of the interviews was 2.8 years, with one father excluded because he did not provide a clear response regarding the length of his relationship.

All participants were enrolled in high school at the time of the interview and were participants in the *Strengthening Relationships/Strengthening Families* program, a program designed to teach relationship skills to pregnant and parenting adolescents. In order to maintain confidentiality, program facilitators individually invited fathers currently enrolled in the program to participate in an interview asking questions about his relationship with the mother of his child.

Procedure

Following approval from Texas State University's Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited from five of the Central Texas high schools served by the *Strengthening Relationships/Strengthening Families* program. Program facilitators approached each father individually at each school they served and asked if they would like to participate in a study regarding adolescent fathers' relationship experiences with the mother of their children. All fathers enrolled in the program were invited to participate regardless of experiences with IPV in order to maintain the safety and confidentiality of those who had experienced IPV. In order to maintain confidentiality, on the day of the interview, participants were asked to leave class to meet with the facilitator as part of case management provided by the program. Once the father left the class, he met the interviewer in a private area on the school's campus and the program facilitator would leave. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as a way to attain the most accurate data possible. Interviews followed the semi-structured interview protocol (please see Appendix A) and were conducted until data reached full saturation. All interviews were conducted during school hours on the high school campus and lasted an average of 45 minutes. All participants signed assent forms prior to being enrolled in the program

and gave verbal consent to participate in this study prior to being interviewed. As a financial incentive, each participant received a gift card in the amount of \$25 following the completion of the interview. I conducted all interviews following training from professors experienced in qualitative data collection.

I began the interviews by debriefing the participants on the topic of the interview and, due to the potential for emotional distress, informed them of their ability to end the interview at any time with no consequence. Following this, I asked if they were currently in a relationship with the mothers of their children, as well as the length of the relationship to date or the overall length of the relationship if it had been terminated. Once this was established, I used a semi-structured interview protocol to collect the data. Each of these interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim onto a Microsoft Word document and uploaded into NVivo10 for analysis. These documents were saved electronically on an encrypted flash drive, and all hard copies were secured in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis

Given that IPV victimization among males is often underreported (Emery, 2010), a qualitative study was utilized so that subtle questions could be asked about their own experiences with victimization, as well as their family members' and peers' experiences, that might not be picked up by more traditional, quantitative measures of IPV. In order to not only uncover themes present in the narratives, but to explore the experiences of adolescent fathers who experienced IPV in their relationship with the mothers of their children, grounded coding theory was employed to analyze all collected data (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Grounded coding theory was selected as it not

only uncovers themes, but also provides possible explanations to how those themes are connected (Taylor & Bogden, 1998). By utilizing this technique, it was possible to explore specific tactics the fathers reported the mothers of their children used, as well as the relationship between how the messages the fathers received about gender and violence impacted their experiences. Two independent coders read over the content of the interviews and made note of all the themes that emerged in the data. We then met and formulated a code sheet. Initially, violence was determined by the physically and emotionally violent tactics illustrated in the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). For analysis, instances of physical violence were categorized as minor or severe based on how they would be labeled using the CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996). That is, instances of slapping, pushing, and pinching were categorized as minor, while instances of being kicked, scratched, or stabbed were labeled as severe (Straus et al., 1996). Additionally, although sexual assault is categorized separately on the CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996), the coercion described by one father was listed as severe physical abuse because it did not occur frequently enough in the narratives to be listed as its own category. Other controlling tactics not described by the CTS2, but were present in the narratives were categorized according to Pence and Paymar's (1993) model of Power and Control.

Following this, we completed a line-by-line analysis using this code sheet to categorize these themes and explored their relationship to the relationship dynamics and gender expectations also discussed during the interviews (Taylor & Bogden, 1998). We then met and reached consensus on the themes we found, updating our code sheet to match our findings (Taylor & Bogden, 1998). Once consensus had been reached, we

recoded the interviews utilizing the new code sheet to identify these themes and although we searched for new themes, we found that saturation had been reached and no new codes were formed by the eighth interview (Taylor & Bogden, 1998). Following this, we began axial coding, in which we began to make connections between how the relationship dynamics described by the fathers illuminated the context in which the tactics uncovered existed. It was also during this stage of analysis when we uncovered how the messages the fathers received about gender and violence impacted their experiences with the mothers of their children. During this time, we divided our themes into three different sections as discussed in the results.

In order to determine if the results were determined from the reports made by the fathers, the analysis followed the four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was formed through triangulation between researchers in the interpretations of the narratives (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, both researchers had prolonged engagement in the field, allowing for a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Although it was not possible to determine the transferability to other populations, such as adolescent fathers of other ethnic groups or in different locations, enough information was provided concerning the experiences being studied to direct future studies. The dependability of the findings was determined through an audit trail, in which researchers kept memos of their analytic process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). These documents were referred to over the entire course of analysis. Finally, confirmability was established through comparison to existing literature examining IPV in similar contexts.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The analysis of these interviews revealed valuable insights into adolescent fathers' experiences of the power and control techniques the mother of their children used. The themes that emerged from the narratives provided explanation of not only the power and control tactics experienced by the adolescent fathers, but also insight into the unique environmental factors that encompass these experiences. The forms of power and control discovered in the narratives were the use of physical and emotional violence, as well as social control and using the child. Additionally, the narratives gave insight into the dynamics that existed within these relationships, such as the inclusion of peers and family into the conflict, a desire to avoid conflict, and, for some fathers, the eventual termination of the relationship. Other themes that emerged provided insight into the messages these fathers received, including their perceptions of masculine relationship roles, how male victims are perceived, and their own reactions, as well as the reactions of others, to their victimization. Finally, the majority of the fathers' experiences were embedded within a culture of conflict and violence that previously existed separate from their relationships with the mothers of their children. In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were utilized for all participants and personal identifiers of those discussed in the narratives were omitted.

Methods of Power and Control

Almost all of the fathers' narratives ($n = 10$) provided a description of the methods of abuse and control utilized by the mothers' of their children. These four types of abuse and control were categorized, in order of prevalence, as emotional abuse ($n = 8$),

social control ($n = 7$), using the children ($n = 5$), and physical abuse ($n = 4$). As a result of experiencing these dynamics, one father, whose sentiment was echoed by others, described feeling as though “she controlled everything that I’d do.”

Emotional Abuse

Although the fathers typically did not describe the behaviors the mothers of their children used as abusive, eight of the narratives revealed techniques that would be categorized as emotional abuse on quantitative measures of IPV. To illustrate, Noah reported how the mother of his child had destroyed his property on multiple occasions. “When she’s mad, I don’t know whether she blacks out... but she starts throwing stuff.... I have two pairs of Beats. I had two pairs, she broke the other pair. And then she threw my Xbox against the wall.” He also described how after one fight with her, she put all of his clothes “in a suitcase and just poured bleach on it.” Elijah also shared how he would “be like, ‘I’m leaving.’ And then she’d be like, ‘well, I’ll kill myself then.’” The other, more frequently discussed tactics were yelling, screaming, and cursing ($n = 7$); belittling ($n = 5$); and disregarding his feelings ($n = 4$).

Yelling, screaming, and cursing. The most common ($n = 7$) emotionally abusive tactic that emerged in the narratives was the use of yelling, screaming, and cursing during arguments. To illustrate, Tristan shared how the mother of his child “would always... yell, just scream out her lungs,” while Mateo discussed how the mother of his child would “yell.... she would get real loud.” Adrian also reported how arguments would escalate into yelling during their morning routine. “She’s like very cranky and she’s trying to do stuff and...she’s yelling at me.” Elijah disclosed a confrontation in which the mother of his child told him ““fuck that, fuck you’...she was yelling at me. And I was

like, ‘look, you don’t need to be saying all of this stuff in front of my son.’ And she was like, ‘I don’t give a fuck what you think.’” Noah shared how these arguments made him feel like less of a person and that he did not feel he was “obligated to give you my attention if you can’t talk to me like I’m a regular human,” when she would yell at him.

Two of the fathers reported they also engaged in yelling or name calling. To illustrate, Victor reported that he would “call her a bitch and all this stuff,” while Isaac discussed mutuality of yelling in the escalation of their conflicts.

Sometimes we would argue, like, in school and stuff like that....When [the teachers] saw that an issue or problem was starting, they’d split us both up...or they’d put us in different rooms, stuff like that. So we could both calm down or whatever.... There was sometimes where we would yell at each other and I mean there was other times they could see that both of us have aggressive tone of voice or like looked like we were gonna get aggressive...verbally, like, get really, really loud and I mean where it would disrupt a lot of people.

This was categorized as an emotionally abusive tactic, as opposed to a developmentally appropriate conflict, as the conflict had escalated to the point where teachers felt the need to intervene.

Belittling. Some of the fathers also reported the mothers of their children would belittle them ($n = 5$). At times, this was described as making them feel badly, such as when the mother of Elijah’s child told him, “‘you’re a piece of shit’” or when the mother of Mateo’s child would “be like, ‘man I hate you!’” Other times, fathers reported feeling like they were always wrong in the relationship. To illustrate, Elijah and Mateo discussed feeling as though everything they did was either wrong or never good enough. Mateo

shared how “[the mother of his child] thinks everything’s perfect about her. She’s like, ‘I did nothing wrong’” whenever he would try to talk about how he was feeling with her. Elijah echoed these sentiments, recalling how he was “always in the wrong, even if I’m over here just trying to be right.” He also shared the toll the repeated belittling took on him:

I’d take her out and then I’d buy her some other shit, just like, for the hell of it. And then, apparently, the shit that I got her wasn’t the ones that she wanted. Then the place that I took her out to wasn’t the right place she wanted to go to. And then I’d do simple stuff, like I’d take her to the park or something. We’d walk around the park. She’d be like, “I’ve done this with other people and they’ve made it more fun.” Apparently, I’m not fun or whatever. I mean, it was just like, simple stuff like that. But then it kept happening over and over again and *everything* I did, living wasn’t enough for her.

Additionally, Adrian stated that the mother of his child “could never be wrong to where if it was like, even if something was true...and it was like in my face, she would still, like, disagreeing that.” He further discussed how he had obtained evidence of her infidelity, but she had denied it every time. He described experiencing this tactic multiple times over the course of their relationship as being “very rough and it was very stressing, like how are you even going to say it’s not true when I see it?”

The narratives also revealed the use of belittling tactics related to money and jobs. To illustrate, Alex shared the difficulties he had in finding employment after the birth of his son. This led to arguments with the child’s mother who said he was “not trying hard enough,” even though he had “put in fifteen applications already.” Mateo discussed how

he would “try, but, it’s like if I do try, it’s never good enough for her.” He elaborated by stating:

‘Cause I lost my job and then I was like, I needed to go get a new one. And then I was looking and everything and she was complaining a lot about the money...so I [got a job] and now she’s complaining to everyone that I need to lose my job. So she’s real confusing.

Elijah also reported he had “been trying so hard...and it was over the summer...And I was a lifeguard so I was out in the hot-ass sun all day doing that and...she was still like, ‘it’s still not enough.’” These descriptions from the fathers made it clear the effects these tactics had on them.

Disregarding his feelings. Some of the fathers ($n = 4$) reported that their partners would disregard their feelings in order to maintain control in the relationship. Adrian and Elijah both reported they felt they were in a one-sided relationship with the mother of their child. To illustrate, Adrian talked about a time when his relationship “came to a point where I literally wasn’t getting any attention from her.... She was talking [romantically] to other people so I felt like I wasn’t enough for her.... I felt kind of...worthless.” Additionally, Mateo and Dominic reported times in which they would try to talk to the mothers of their children about their unhappiness with their behavior. Mateo recalled, “Any time I ever tried to bring up an argument, she’d be like, ‘why argue right now?’...I’d be like, the hell? Well when you want to argue it’s okay.... when I want to, I can’t even talk to you.” In addition, Dominic explained what happened when he tried to stop the mother of his child from reading through all the texts on his phone, including

those from his mother, “I just felt like, I need my privacy... I tell her but it comes out the other ear.”

Social Control

Social control was another common tactic reported by the fathers ($n = 7$) in this study. Common tactics to emerge in the narratives were: controlling who they talked to ($n = 5$), “talking mess” and spreading rumors ($n = 4$), being generally controlling ($n = 3$), as well as attempting to sabotage new relationships ($n = 2$). Additionally, this social control took place not only through person-to-person contact, but also electronically ($n = 6$) through social media, such as Facebook, as well as through texting. It is important to note that multiple fathers reported using this tactic to also control the mother of their child.

Controlling who they talk to. Five fathers reported that the mother of their child controlled to whom they talked. Some of the fathers, such as Mateo, attributed this to jealousy, saying, “But she was like, a real, real jealous type. Like, where I couldn’t talk to no, no girls. So she only wanted me to probably talk to three guys and that was it.” Additionally, he recalled a specific instance in which the jealousy and control turned to physical violence:

I remember one time I was going to my friend’s house. And she, we were at her sister’s house and I was like, “You know, I’m just going to leave with my friend real quick, just down the street...we’re just gonna hang out at his house...then I’ll come back in like, twenty minutes or something.” And like, she got mad because...I guess some girl just walked past...and she thought I was trying to see that girl.... And then she tried kicking me. She kicked me like in my arm or something.

Tristan also discussed how the mother of his child had “told me not to talk to this person, this person.” He also described a specific instance when he ran into a female friend.

I was like, “oh hey.” And she was like, “oh hey!” And we started talking again....

[My girlfriend] didn’t like it. She got mad. [My friend] was like, “what’s she getting mad for? We’re just talking, we’re just friends.” And I was like, “well, it’s a pretty long story!” So I was just, you know, “I just wanted to say hi and wish you luck and luck and because, you know, I can’t talk to you for that long.”

After the mother of his child changed schools, Tristan described how free he felt: “I don’t have to be walking down the hall doing this to my face [*puts his hands up to his eyes and looks away*] like, ‘I don’t need to talk to you...’ I could be talking to everybody.” Additionally, Elijah reported that the mother of his child would control to whom he talked before their relationship had officially begun. He discussed having an interest in another girl, but the mother of his child told him, “‘I don’t care if you’re with her. I want to hang out, you to be with me.’ So, I mean, I guess from the beginning it was kind of like that, when I think about it.”

Although these fathers reported jealousy as the motivation for the mother of their child controlling to whom they talked, Isaac and Noah reported experiencing this form of control in other relationships. To illustrate, Isaac discussed the toll it took on his friendships. “She just like, every time I would try to talk to [my friends], she would get mad at me and be like, ‘oh, you don’t pay attention to me!’” Additionally, Noah shared that the mother of his child was “the type, like, I don’t want you to have this person in your phone.” He also discussed how he could not have his “sister’s number in [his] phone ‘cause they didn’t get along.”

Additionally, Isaac and Tristan both reported they had also utilized this control tactic in their relationship with the mothers of their children. To illustrate, Isaac discussed how “her friends would come to her and try to take her.... I wouldn’t...hold her back or anything. I was like, ‘if you want to go you can...’ But I mean, she wouldn’t go, ‘cause...she knew I would get mad.” Tristan also talked about how “we were both like that” in terms of controlling who the other person talked to. He had told her “‘well you don’t talk to this person, that person!’ We were just going at each other until finally...we got to the point where we deleted all our social media, we had hardly any communication to anybody else.”

“Talking mess” and spreading rumors. Four fathers reported that the mother of their child would often “talk mess” about them or spread rumors. Talking mess was described as how “she’ll try to make me look real, real bad” to others. To illustrate, Mateo discussed how “she’s been talking mess since I first met her,” but this behavior had not ended and “she’s been talking mess about me though now.” Although his relationship with the mother of his child had ended, the effects of her “talking mess” were long lasting. He shared that “no one really talks to me [at school]...because most of the time she already told them something.” Similarly, when asked if the mother of his child said bad things about him to others, Elijah replied, “She definitely does! And there’s no ifs, ands, or buts about it. But I don’t want her to just be sitting there and at all times just talking shit about me.” He added that she would tell people “I was like, being the asshole and she was the victim.” He reported “she turned all of her family on me...by telling them that we were together and then I brought this girl over to the house and that I was fucking her while she was there.”

General control. In addition to these specific tactics, three of the fathers discussed how the mother of their child had been generally controlling. Elijah described how “she wouldn’t let me do anything, she’d check up on me everywhere.” He elaborated by sharing

I was going to be a football player.... And I was gonna be a soccer player, I was gonna freaking exceed [at] everything. Then I moved over there and she started controlling my life. I was like, “I’m going to do this, this, and this.” And she’s like, “well, that doesn’t give me time with you on this day, this day, or this day.” I wanted to be in ROTC because I wanted to join the military when I got out of high school and then she was like, “well, that means that I can’t hug you or kiss you. So don’t do it.”

Similarly, Mateo reported how the mother of his child had been controlling when they had been together. “If I wanted to go, I like fishing...And it’s like, I can’t even do that...It’s like the simplest thing ever. And I tell her...’I’m gonna go with my friend just fishing over here.’ And she would just get mad.” Noah also described the mother of his child as “not willing to compromise on too much of nothing.”

Attempting to sabotage new relationships. Out of all the fathers who had broken up with the mother of their child ($n = 4$), half ($n = 2$) described how the mothers of their children would attempt to sabotage either a new relationship or what she perceived to be a new relationship. To illustrate, Elijah described how the mother of his child had verbally assaulted his new girlfriend by telling her, “‘you’ll never be his mom and you’ll never be anything close to his mom. You’re a home wrecker and fuck you.’” She had also threatened his new girlfriend on multiple occasions saying, “‘you bitch, you

slut, I'm gonna beat your ass! And you better leave.'” He also described the following altercation the mother of his child had with his current girlfriend:

[The mother of my child] was talking all this shit and [my current girlfriend] is a really good person in confrontation. If a confrontation happens, she smiles at the person. And she's like, “okay.” You know?She's a pacifist. And I mean, I never been with a pacifist but I mean, it's a first time or whatever. I've seen her like, the first time they had conflict or whatever the whole time [my girlfriend] was smiling and stuff and was like, “okay. Yeah.”.... So after the second confrontation [the mother of my child] was like, “hey, the fuck you giving me these dirty looks? Quit fucking looking at me like that, I'll hit you, bitch!” And she was yelling and stuff about it.

Mateo reported how the mother of his child had utilized more covert methods in order to sabotage what he felt she perceived to be a potential new relationship with a close female friend of his.

[The mother of my child] was on my Facebook, pretending to text [my friend], like, “hey” or something. But I was already texting her ...And she told me, she was like, “hey do you know your Facebook's up?” I was like, “no.” I was like, “I don't know.” And they were like, “well, someone's trying to pretend it's you.” And she told me that she thinks it's her and I was like, “oh...it probably is...just don't text back.”

Texting and Social Media. As illustrated above, half of all participants reported that the social control extended past personal interactions with the mother of their child by way of social media and texting. Noah shared his frustrations, saying “Oh my god,

Facebook sucks. But anyways, she got on one day and was just talking about me.” Tristan discussed how he and the mother of his child “deleted my Facebook and everything. We just re-deleted everything ‘cause I knew it would cause, um, having Facebook it causes a lot of problems. A lot of issues.” Mateo talked about how the mother of his child was “just posting like if she had nothing better to do...like every other status was about me.” He also described how she would “talk on Facebook too. She posted like a lot of mess. Like, right now, I know lately she posted I haven’t seen my daughter or something.” Additionally, he reported, “she just complains and complains.... She’ll be like, if I don’t do something right, she’s just gonna post it on Facebook or something.”

In addition to using Facebook for social control, other fathers reported experiencing social control via text messages. To illustrate, Alex discussed how the mother of his child continued to reach him after they had broken up: “She just text me like, “what are you doing? What are you doing?” Stuff like that.” These texts were so frequent he eventually “deleted her number and blocked it.”

Although Alex described feeling harassed by the mother of his child via text messages, other fathers reported the mothers of their children controlling them by reading through their text messages. To illustrate, Noah talked about how the mother of his child was, “the type to go through my phone and stuff. And I don’t put locks on my phone. You know I don’t believe I have anything to hide. So I didn’t. And so...she went through my phone.” Dominic also shared that the mother of his child would go through “some things on my phone. Like, I text my mom and she has to read them all.” He also shared that as time went on it was “more common that she’ll look at my phone.”

Using the Children

The fathers ($n = 5$) also described how their children were used as a control tactic in these relationships. The most common method in which the fathers reported their children being used as a method of control against them was through threatening to take the child away or refusing to let them see their child ($n = 3$). To illustrate, Dominic shared that the mother of his child would tell him, “that she’ll leave and take my daughter.” Elijah said the mother of his child told him, “[I will] take your son away from you if you ever bring [your new girlfriend] over again!” He also described how she followed through on this threat.

She wouldn’t answer my calls, answer my texts. And I was like, I’m missing my son. I hate her. And I called her mom and I was like, I hate you too. And her mom would answer the phone and be like, “why the fuck are you calling me?” I’d be like, “I just wanted to know if I could see my son.” She’d be like, “Naw!” And she’d hang up.... But that was really hard.

Victor also shared how, “before all this, we had got into an argument and I hardly see my son. But now since...we talk to each other and all that, I get to see my son more. And that’s all that matters.”

However, other miscellaneous methods of using the child also emerged in the fathers’ narratives. One example was, before her pregnancy, the mother of Adrian’s child had repeatedly told him that she was pregnant in order to keep him in the relationship. Another father, Elijah, discussed how the mother of his child used their child to gain proximity to his new girlfriend.

I was going to get the car seat from baby mama, and I was like, “here, I’ll put it in.” She goes, “no I want to make sure he’s in right.” And I’m like, “I’ve done it thousands of times, like, I got this.” And she was like, “no, my parents are talking to you. So go talk to them.” So she put him in the car and apparently as soon as she put him in the car she was talking shit to [my new girlfriend].

Physical Abuse

The fathers in this study who experienced physical violence ($n = 4$) described a broad range of physically violent tactics. These tactics were divided into two categories of violence, minor and severe, based on the categories in the CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996). The minor instances of physical violence included being pushed and slapped by the mother of their child ($n = 4$). For Noah, the physical assault was an isolated occurrence. He recalled when, during an argument, “She pushed me. I was like, ‘...don’t put your hands on me.’ ... [she] ends up pushing me again.” However, Mateo and Elijah referenced multiple instances in which arguments would escalate into physical violence. To illustrate, Elijah reported “But it was, like, towards the end where she hit me two or three times on separate occasions.” He later elaborated by sharing a story in which the mother of his child “just slapped, she just hit me” during an argument. Additionally, Mateo recalled how the mother of his child would utilize physically violent tactics in order to maintain control in the relationship. “Like, before like she would try to pinch me or something. Kind of like low. Like, she would just be like, ‘no don’t do that.’” Additionally, he shared how this physical violence became a reoccurring method of abuse in their relationship:

So it's like, if I did something wrong she would just hit me and I would be like, I couldn't really do anything about it so I was like...yeah, so she was like, in the beginning she would hit me a lot. Like, I don't know what it was. I don't know. I don't know why I was still with her; she hit me like a lot in the beginning.

Mateo also shared how, in order to intimidate him the mother of his child would "get kinda close and she'll like move her arm or something and I'll be like, 'what the hell?'"

The severe tactics of violence described by the fathers ($n = 3$) varied and no severe method of violence was seen across narratives. To illustrate, Noah shared that, "when she pushed me she scratched me. So I got like this long scratch on my face." This was categorized as severe because it left a mark and, when police were called, they asked if he needed an ambulance. Additionally, Mateo recalled how the mother of his child utilized multiple severely violent tactics over the course of their relationship. He shared a time in which he "was bending over to grab something, she tried kicking me in my head... when I was getting up she kicked my arm...She's just like, 'why are you trying to leave here?'" He later shared another time in which "she left me like a busted lip." He went on to describe that the incident that really upset him was when his girlfriend "stabbed me in the back of my arm....We were arguing and I turned around, I guess she grabbed me and stabbed my back. The thing was, the knife was just hanging there and I was like, 'what the hell?'"

In another extreme example, Elijah reported being sexually assaulted by the mother of his child on multiple occasions when she would get him drunk. "She gave me vodka so she could fuck me up.... I just, I basically laid there with a hard on or whatever. She would basically do whatever she wanted to me. I wouldn't say no, though." He later

on discussed how he suspected the assaults had led to her pregnancy. “I don’t even know if she put a condom on me every time. I’m sure that’s probably how she got pregnant.

Relationship Dynamics

Although the tactics of abuse and control described by the fathers are important in understanding their experiences, many of the fathers reported certain relationship dynamics that provide perspective. To illustrate, many ($n = 4$) of the fathers reported their conflicts with the mother of their child did not stay isolated within the dyad, instead extending to directly include both peers and family. Another dynamic almost all of the fathers ($n = 8$) reported was a desire to avoid conflict, in which they would not disagree with their partners because they felt it would escalate, sometimes into violence. In addition, three of the four fathers who reported ending their relationships with the mothers of their children described their motivation for doing so as deciding that they were going to give up on their relationship.

Inclusion of Peers and Family

In addition to the control tactics the adolescent fathers experienced from the mothers of their children, four of the fathers also described being controlled, harassed, and threatened by third parties. These third parties were comprised of both peers and family members. Noah shared how the mother of his child’s friends would harass him over text saying, “‘oh, he’s a bad person!’... ‘He a bad dad!’ That really stopped me on that one. I was like, ‘what!’” Mateo reported that he felt the mother of his child’s friends would try to instigate conflict between the two of them. “I would talk to other girls, kinda. But I wouldn’t talk to ‘em [romantically], I would just talk to them as like a friend... And someone would tell her and they would...make a big deal about it.” Elijah

discussed how the mother of his child would utilize her family to threaten him during custody exchanges at her house:

And then she goes inside and her dad comes out. And I was like, “oh I should have expected this much.” Her dad hates me.... And then he comes out with her little sister’s boyfriend.... He starts talking shit to me and...he was yelling at me. And he was threatening me. He was like “if you ever come over here again I’m gonna shoot you!” And I mean, I’ve gone over there since, but I still feel like he’s gonna shoot me or something. I’m pretty sure he’s gonna do it at some point in time.

Additionally, Mateo and Noah both discussed feeling as though his child’s maternal grandmother would harass him, with Noah reporting she would attempt to interfere with his ability to see his son.

This inclusion of peers and family also extended to the fathers’ social circles. Many reported an animosity that existed among friends and family towards the mother of his child that would manifest itself in conflict and confrontation. To illustrate, Tristan discussed how a female friend of his physically assaulted the mother of his child at school during lunch. He also discussed how his grandmother become involved after the mother of his child wanted to bring over another guy they believed she was dating. “When I told my grandma, my grandma got pissed, my grandma went to go tell her ‘you ain’t gonna be bringing nobody to this house! And if I find out, all your shit’s going out!’” Mateo and Noah disclosed similar stories about how their sisters responded with a desire to physically assault the mother of their children when she was saying bad things about them online. Noah shared:

We got into an argument, I left. She ended up getting on Facebook, saying some things. And my sister, you know, ends up commenting again. ‘Cause she said it seemed serious.... I was upset, I was like, “I really don’t want to talk about it.” So she ends up coming down there, the next day.... So, me knowing my sister, she’s very feisty, you know? She fights and I’m just like, “don’t, you know, don’t do that! You better not do that, you know? I might want to see it, but don’t do it.”

In addition to these tactics, Tristan, Elijah, and Mateo reported that the mothers of their children would attempt to make them jealous by bringing their new boyfriends around. For Tristan, this occurred while they were still in a relationship. “What got me mad was when she started saying [to another guy], ‘why don’t you just come pick me up’ And that’s when it pissed me off. I was like, ‘nobody’s coming to my house.’” In Elijah’s case, although he and the mother of his child had ended their relationship, she was still living with him and she “started bringing this guy over to the house.” Elijah described how he felt by saying: “I was like, bullshit.... Every time she come to pick me up she had that boyfriend that...she brought over to the house.” Mateo described how after they had broken up, the mother of his child would text him saying, “‘well, I’m gonna go over here with this dude.’ Or ‘I’m gonna go find a new guy.’”

Desire to Avoid Conflict

Despite this inclusion of others into their conflict, a dynamic of interest existing in many of the narratives ($n = 8$) were the fathers’ reports of giving into the wishes of the mother of their child in order to avoid conflict. This desire to avoid conflict was often based in the fear that if they were to disagree with her, they would risk starting an argument that would escalate and potentially end with violence, either emotional or

physical. To illustrate, Elijah described how he would “walk into the conversation cautious. I, you know, step around the glass the whole time and then she’s sitting here slinging the sledgehammer at the glass.” When asked what he was thinking when he and his girlfriend had disagreements, Joel responded with, “don’t say anything right now ‘cause all it’s gonna do is escalate.” Noah also described how he would think: “I’m not gonna say nothing though ‘cause that’d be an argument.” Victor reiterated this sentiment by saying, “I try so hard not to argue back so it won’t lead to a bigger problem. I usually stay quiet.” Isaac also reported agreeing to end friendships at her request because “I don’t want no issues or problems with her.”

Another reason listed by the fathers for avoiding conflict with the mothers of their child was fear of terminating access to their child. For instance, Elijah discussed,

But the thing is, I want things to go my way too. But I don’t tell her anything because I know that it’ll cause us to fight or whatever. And the thing is I’m here for my son. I’m not here for her at all and so I’d rather just not fight with her so that way I can get my son when I want to.

Additionally, Dominic described how he felt “sad” and “mad” when the mother of his child threatened to take their child away. As a result, he said: “I just shut up because I didn’t want that [for her to take his child from him].... I don’t react.... I just stay quiet and let her have her way.”

Giving Up

Of the fathers who were no longer in relationships with the mother of their child at the time of the interview ($n = 4$), 75% ($n = 3$) reported ending their relationship due to the fact that the father had grown tired of the abuse or given up on their relationship. To

illustrate, Noah described how when people experience the abusive tactics he described in his relationship and the “same thing happens repeatedly, you know, you get tired of it eventually. It’s just pretty much what happened.” Mateo recalled how, at the end of their relationship, “I just told her, ‘I’m tired of arguing. I’m really tired of everything...I don’t want to deal with it.’” Elijah explained that after spending all of his money on the mother of his child, he realized the following: “My account was at zero; I looked at it and was like, ‘it’s time to give up.... I’m not gonna try.’”

Messages and Perceptions of Abuse

Almost all fathers ($n = 11$) interviewed described various perceptions of abuse, whether it was their personal experiences of abuse or how they perceived this dynamic in other relationships. These perceptions were divided up into two main themes. One theme was the messages received by adolescent fathers about masculine gender roles and male victims of violence. The other theme discovered in the narratives was the fathers’ perceptions of their own abuse.

Messages About Gender

The fathers discussed messages that they had received about masculinity. Many of the fathers reported feeling the need to adhere to traditional gender roles as a partner and as a father. To illustrate, Adrian described his perfect partner as “more caring and stuff like that. More of what a girlfriend-slash-wife should be...take[s] care of me...and I work and you know provide for her. Me, her, and the baby. And she just stays home and cleans.” While discussing an ideal parenting situation, Tristan reported, “the girl can take the afternoon shift. And when the guy gets home [he] can take the night shift...Try. If the guy’s not tired.” Noah reiterated these sentiments, “the male’s the head of the household.

I see him going to go get money. But I'm not gonna object to her wanting to work or anything like that." Mateo said that, ideally, "the guy would just be working then go home and... just wake up to the house clean and everything already fixed and perfect."

Additionally, four of the fathers discussed how they provided for the mother of their child. Dominic reported, "I don't treat her bad. You know, whenever she wants something, I'll go get it for her." Noah said, "I had to give her money" and Elijah described how, even after they had broken up he wanted to "support her financially for as long as I could...told her that she could live with me. That I'd move out as soon as I can, that I would work, so that way I can provide, and she could stay [in my home]." Isaac reported how his father responded when he told him about the pregnancy: "I told you to, you know, wrap your shit up. He was like, 'you didn't do it...so you gotta be a man.'"

In addition to the messages Isaac received from his father, Mateo and Elijah also discussed ideas of masculinity they gained from their family. Mateo recalled a time when "two of my uncles tried beating [my stepfather] up because he called him a girl... so my uncle got mad and tried fighting him." He also reported that his father was a "hoe" who would "look for [girlfriends] that clean and cook a lot." Elijah described how he had been "raised to be a boss [and] to be a gentleman. And being a gentleman comes first." Additionally, when he reported feeling as though he was the primary caregiver of his child, he described that he had "basically picked up a mother role."

Gender and Violence

The adolescent fathers in this study discussed gender roles specifically in the context of IPV. None of the fathers interviewed condoned IPV perpetrated by either males or females, such as Joel who expressed that "nobody should be hitting anybody."

Tomas described how he felt that “either the girl is more crazier than the guy or the guy is more crazier than the girl.... The guy if the guy slaps the girl or the girl if she slaps the boy.” Tristan and Isaac voiced strong opinions about violence against women. Tristan discussed how he had “learned how to respect a girl. I don’t know. I wouldn’t abuse nobody. I wouldn’t hit nobody. I wouldn’t yell at no girl... that’s wrong! That’s not right.” Isaac described different ways he believed men who experienced abuse at the hands of their female partners would respond.

There’s a few [guys] that would get up and leave, but I mean there’s most people, most guys that would react physically. But, I mean, those guys are those guys. I’m, I mean, the guys that turn around and walk away, or you know they end up getting up and leaving, that’s the real man right there. Because I mean, it takes a guy, a real man, to walk away from someone who was [abusive].

Noah reiterated these sentiments in the context of an argument with the mother of his child. He reported feeling angry at his partner when she had destroyed his belongings. However, he described how, because she was female, he had maintained his temper but that “if [she] were a dude I would kick [her] ass!”

Despite this, many of the participants reported greater leniency towards female perpetrated violence than male perpetrated violence. To illustrate, Joel said, “if she does hit him it’s not gonna be as bad...it’s the same kind of bad, but it’s not gonna be-it wouldn’t be as much damage as a guy hits a girl.” Dominic reported that for a female in an abusive relationship, “if she’s done wrong she still shouldn’t get hit.” However, a male, “shouldn’t be letting himself get hit.” Tomas said that if he encountered a male hitting a female he would “go push him and get him out of the way.”

However, he described that if he encountered a female hitting a male he nonverbally gestured that he would hold the girl in order to, “get her away from him.” Additionally, Isaac discussed feeling that:

It looks worse on a guy.... But I mean, neither one looks good if you really stand back and look at it. But, I mean most people really don't. I mean, when a girl hits a guy, they're like, “well, that's your fault, fool”... and I mean, when a guy hits a girl like, “fuh you, bitch!”

Joel felt a reason for that discrepancy was that “most of the time your girlfriend's a lot smaller than you. So she's probably not as strong as you. And so of course you're going to be able to overpower her.”

This greater leniency towards female perpetrated violence was demonstrated in the narratives of the fathers who had experienced violence and control in their relationships with the mother of their child. To illustrate, Isaac discussed how this had affected his school's administration disciplinary decision-making.

She tried to slap me, but I dodged it. And then I turned around and I pushed her against the wall.... And after that... I let her go, I mean I walked away and then, 'cause I mean at that time I was already heated. So instead of... me making it worse or it escalating, I walked away.... Then the principal came and got me or whatever 'cause they had got it on camera. And then it was like, I was like, “it was an act of self-defense.... You're gonna tell me if a student swings at you then that's what you're gonna do?” Like, it was an act of self-defense.... The school officials were kinda mad because I couldn't get a ticket for it because it was an act of self-defense.... I just got three days in ISS [in school suspension].

When asked the punishment the mother of his child received for attempting to hit him, he reported that she did not receive one “‘cause she was a girl.” Additionally, half of the fathers ($n = 5$) reported others who knew about the abuse and control questioned why the victims did not simply leave. A friend of Dominic’s told him, “‘that’s stupid.” And, “why do you deal with that?”” When Mateo was in a relationship with the mother of a child, he reported that a friend of his would always tell him to leave her. “He’s like, ‘man, why you still with her?’ And I’m just like, ‘I don’t know.’” A friend of Elijah’s “was like, ‘I don’t know why you put up with that for so long. She’s lucky that you put up with it as long as you did.’” Isaac described how, “a lot of my guy friends they’re like, ‘well, I don’t know how you can deal with all that, if it was me I would have already left her.’”

The reactions described in the narratives were illustrative of others’ opinions that, as the male, they were expected to be dominant over their partner. Mateo’s “dad [would] just be like, ‘you need to control her, boy or get rid of her.’” He also described how, “everyone kinda saw it as abusive, though, because her family was telling me ... ‘why are you letting her hit you?’” His own family would “say they don’t like how she talks to me. That she has no respect.” Dominic described feeling reluctant to tell his father about the mother of his child controlling him because his father would “totally get mad ‘cause I guess he’d want me to be, you know, more strict or something on her. Like, more giving it back to her.” Tristan also felt that if others knew about the control he had experienced in his relationship, they would perceive him as “crazy.” He thought that others would think, “out of everybody, bro, why would you still want to be with her? You have... all these other females.” Additionally, after disclosing a violent encounter with the mother of his child, a friend of Elijah told him, “I understand that you’re a boss... and she treated

you like you were a bitch today.” These sentiments clearly illustrate the way others perceive male victims of IPV.

Reactions to Abuse

These perceptions of IPV made by others extend into the adolescent fathers’ reactions to their own experiences of control and abuse. Some of the fathers described minimizing the abuse ($n = 4$) or blaming themselves ($n = 3$) for their abuse. However, three fathers reported being assertive following a physical assault. Additionally, over half of the fathers ($n = 7$) discussed their reasons for disclosing, or deciding not to disclose, their victimization experiences.

Minimization. Four of the fathers reported minimization of the violence and control they had experienced. To illustrate, although reporting that the mother of his child would often yell at him, Tristan also said, “She just gets a little bit mad.” Additionally, after the mother of Noah’s child had assaulted him leaving a scratch on his face, the police asked, “do you want to call an ambulance?” I was like, ‘what the f-? For what?’” Mateo reported several instances of minimization. Initially, he described how they “had a good relationship but, I don’t know. She was...abusive.” Specifically, he talked about how “it really didn’t hurt me, though; it was like, more of just a little kick, punching me, or something.” One of the most extreme examples of minimization was Mateo’s reaction to being stabbed by the mother of his child:

I was bleeding and then she got scared. And she was panicking more than me.

And I was like, sitting there.... I was like, “it’s okay, you know, it really didn’t hurt that much.” ... ‘Cause I really didn’t feel it either really. I just went, it felt

like a pinch or something. I was like, “what the heck?” I just pulled it out and put my arm over it.

In addition to these examples, two of the fathers provide instances in which there was ambiguity as to whether or not minimization of physical abuse was occurring or whether or not their partner was only “playing.” To illustrate, Victor reported how the mother of his child was, “messing with me while I’m asleep. That’s not cool.” When asked to clarify Victor reported, “I do the same thing. Like, pinching me and scratching me.” He described this as “play fighting and stuff like that.” Diego reported that the mother of his child “would kind of hit me on the back but not like, hard, but like, hit, hit. Like, ‘I’m playin’.” When asked why he thought she did this, he responded by saying “just to get what she wants.” Additionally, he did not express fear of his partner because “she’s too little.” However, when asked how he would have felt had she been physically larger, he said: “Then I’d be scared... ‘Cause she doesn’t have that much force on me.”

Self-blame. Three of the fathers reported blaming themselves for their experiences. Tristan discussed this in the context of the emotional abuse he experienced, “Sometimes I trigger it because... she talks to me. And sometimes, oh my God, she talks too much and I’m like ‘okay!’” Although this occurred in the context of emotional abuse, other fathers blamed themselves for the physical abuse they experienced too. To illustrate, after his partner had grown increasingly violent, Mateo “was like, you know, what am I doing wrong?” Elijah also reported feelings of self-blame in the context of his physical violence victimization. “Most of the time I was like, ‘I’m always doing things wrong. What can I do to fix it?’” Additionally, when discussing how the mother of his

child had gotten him drunk in order to have sex with him, he had added, “I wouldn’t say no, though.”

Additionally, these feelings were not isolated to self-blame. Three of the fathers reported experiencing messages of victim blaming for their experiences. Mateo’s family had told him, ““you need to stop letting her hit you.”” Noah discussed how, when news of how the mother of his child had assaulted him begun to spread around the school, “at first people were like, ‘oh what did you do to make her do this?’ Or, ‘did you do this? Did you do that?’” Isaac declined to tell his father about the mother of his child attempting to slap him because “my dad would have just been like, ‘well, it’s your fault for being in a relationship where that’s your fault for doing whatever you did to make her.’”

Assertive. Despite this, three of the four fathers who reported physical abuse reported at least one instance in which they were assertive following an assault. Mateo described how, after being hit by the mother of his child, they “had talks and everything and then I talked to her [because], you know, I don’t want her hitting me.” Isaac was a little more assertive when he told the mother of his child: ““Look, don’t ever freaking touch me again.”” Similarly, Noah reported saying, ““don’t put your hands on me.””

Disclosure decisions. When asked who they talked to about the power and control they experienced, seven of the fathers discussed who they told and who they did not tell. To illustrate, Adrian reported how he “wouldn’t tell [his mom] just for the perception that my mom sees her. ‘Cause I don’t want my mom to see her in a bad way.” Similarly, Dominic discussed how his mom “was the one that I can really trust” and was the one he talked to about his relationship with the mother of his child. However, he went on to say, “just not like, the bad things...it’s hard to tell her about, you know, all those

things.” Tristan reported that, “Whenever we had fights I would talk to my little brother after that, about this and that. But I really didn’t tell him much because I didn’t want him to go and tell my mom.” Isaac also said: “I never told anybody in my family about it nor my friends” and Elijah said, “I don’t think my mom knows that she hit me.” Interestingly, although Noah said he did not want to tell anyone about being physically assaulted, the mother of his child was “bragging about how she went to jail” for physically assaulting him. Despite this, Tristian reported his ability to disclose information about his relationship to his grandparents.

Mostly I’d talk to my grandparents about it.... They’d support me; they’d always be like, “it’s whatever you want to do. If you want to be with her, if you want to be with somebody else, you know, you’re our grandchild and we’ll always love whoever you want to be with.”

Other adolescent fathers reported having a close peer with whom they could talk. For example, Dominic told a friend about how the mother of his child would look through his texts. Additionally, Elijah discussed that he told his “ride or die” friend “about it ‘cause that’s my baby mama. I gotta tell someone about it.” Although Mateo talked about how there was “one guy friend [who] knows everything,” he also disclosed his fears that if he talked to other guys about his relationship, they would perceive him as gay. As a result, “it’s kinda more [easy] to open up and talk to girls because then if I talk to a guy it’s like homo or something. You know...they’re like, ‘oh, you’re gay’ or something. I’m like no I’m not.”

Living in a Culture of Conflict and Violence

Many ($n = 8$) of the fathers reported previous experiences of conflict or violence from either their families of origin or peer groups. Although Joel and Isaac reported no physical violence in their families of origin, they did discuss high levels of conflict. To illustrate, Tomas discussed how, as a child, his parents would argue and he “would try to get one of them from each other so they wouldn’t argue [by] yell[ing] and scream[ing] and stuff.”

Some of the fathers reported witnessing violence between family members. To illustrate, Alex described fights between his mother and stepfather. “They’d fight a lot where... my dad would come to my room and stuff... [his] shirt’s all ripped up and his face is all red.” He also added, “I don’t know if it’s weird but I’m used to it.” Diego also discussed witnessing conflicts between his parents. “My dad, he would always drink and he would yell at my mom a lot... Like, sometimes they would fight and he got put in jail.”

Noah and Elijah both discussed how their fathers’ involvement in dealing drugs led to violence in their families of origin.

He sold drugs and everything like that. And I would say he had like a high position in doing that, you know? He had a lot of money.... And one of the girls [he dated], they ended up setting him up to get busted or whatever and that; he ended up going to jail. But for her, on her part, she kinda got beat up, you know. So then it was just like “Oh, whoa.” But like, she pulled a gun on him though. So yeah, I mean, he ended up getting shot in the leg.... So he beat her up.

Mateo discussed a similar experience with his father and mother:

The more he would sell, the more weary he would get because selling gets you itchy, more itchy. Makes you more on edge, you know? He used to sleep with a .09 under his pillow. And after a while she'd say something and he'd hit her.... Selling made him itchy [and he] started getting really, really violent. But you know, the whole abusive relationship. Like, stereotypical things where he'd hit you then be like, "oh, I'm sorry, I didn't want to hurt you." And it was exactly like that, and my mom fell for it, for a good while.... Because you're getting hit by this person that you love and then they tell you they're sorry and they didn't mean to, you're gonna forgive them 'cause you are, you don't know why you do what you do.

Elijah also discussed how witnessing this violence affected his perception of the violence inflicted on him. "I would think about it like I think about my parents' relationship. And it wasn't like that at all. She didn't beat the shit out of me all the time, and if she did I probably would have left her sooner."

In addition to witnessing violence in their families of origin, Tristan, Elijah, and Mateo all reported being victims of the violence. Tristan described how he and his mother had "an attitude towards each other. And it's kinda like once it sparks, it's like you don't even want to be at home. It's not even worth, you know, talking to each other. We should just let it burn out." He went on to describe a time when he was in elementary school and "couldn't even sit down" because he "was that much bruised up." Although Child Protective Services had been called, and he reported there was no longer any physical violence between them, he described how, to this day, "once things escalate they *whoo!* It hits the fan so hard! It just splatters everywhere." Similarly, Elijah reported,

“when I was younger [my dad would] whoop my ass senselessly. Belts mostly, but he would hit me to the point where I would bleed. Like, go to school with cuts and bruises, and I wouldn’t be able to sit down.” Mateo recounted a physical altercation when his stepfather had told him, “‘if you were my kid I would have already whooped your ass...but you’re not my kid.’ And then...he tried starting to fight me.”

Other fathers reported violence between peers, such as Tristan who had recounted a female friend instigating a physical altercation with his current partner prior to her pregnancy. Elijah described learning to fight during early adolescence, “I started to get into a lot of gangs around that time too. And I’m not gang affiliated any more. And I’d started getting into a lot of fights or whatever, and I started practicing fighting.” Noah and others discussed instances of being involved in physical altercations with their peers. Although this culture of violence expands outside of the dyadic violence and control, it was a critical theme within the narratives which helped to illuminate the experiences of the adolescent fathers.

Despite these examples, Dominic discussed an opposite experience growing up. He described how arguments between his parents had “never gotten violent. Yeah, so I guess that’s why I’m not towards my girlfriend ‘cause I’ve never seen that. I wouldn’t be like that to daughter either, ‘cause I mean I’ve never seen that.”

These narratives provided valuable insight into the wide variety of power and control tactics experienced by adolescent fathers by the mothers of their children, such as physical and emotional violence as well as social control and use of the children. In addition to the techniques described, the fathers also discussed relationship dynamics that, while not controlling or abusive themselves, are critical to understanding their

experiences. Finally, the fathers also described the messages they received about masculinity and violence that shaped their relationships with the mothers of their children, and the control within them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overall, the fathers in this study reported experiencing physical and emotional abuse as well as social control. They also described how the mothers of their children would use their child against them. Other important themes to emerge from the data include relationship dynamics that, although not abusive themselves, help provide understanding of these fathers' experiences, such as the inclusion of family and peers into the conflict, a desire to avoid this conflict, and giving up at the end of the relationship. They also discussed receiving messages to adhere to traditional gender roles, even to the extent to which it sometimes affected their perceptions of the abuse they experienced, leading to minimization and self-blame. Finally, the majority of the fathers described living in a culture of high conflict and violence, which provides support for Social learning theory in terms of their relationships with the mothers of their children. Although many of these findings are supported by the current literature, one notable difference was the theme of "giving up," which contrasts with other research describing the decision to leave an abusive relationship as a process (Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Despite some limitations with the design of this study, a number of implications exist for both researchers and practitioners.

Discussion

Fathers' Experiences with IPV

Similar to the research on male perpetrated IPV, the fathers in this study reported the mothers of their children used emotional abuse (Hall, Walters, & Basile, 2012; Pence & Paymar, 1993), social control (Hall et al., 2012; Johnson, 1995; Pence & Paymar,

1993), the children, (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006; Hays, 2012; Toews & Bermea, 2015), and physical abuse (Black et al., 2011; Johnson, 1995; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Reno et al., 2000) to exert power and control in their relationships. Consistent with the literature, emotional abuse was the most common tactic perpetrated by adolescent mothers (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). To illustrate, Toews and colleagues (2011) found that yelling was a tactic commonly employed by adolescent mothers. Similarly, seven of the twelve fathers in this study reported experiencing this. However, despite high rates of mutual perpetration found in adolescent relationships (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012), particularly in adolescent parent relationships (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014), only two of the fathers in this study reported perpetrating, as well as experiencing, this tactic. However, these findings could be related to social desirability bias.

Social control was another prominent tactic reported by the fathers ($n = 7$). Although there is a dearth of research pertaining specifically to social control in adolescent relationships, this is consistent with literature on violent and controlling relationships in general (Johnson, 1995; Leisring, 2013; Pence & Paymar, 1993). In adult relationships, this is typically seen as one partner controlling what the other partner does, where he or she goes, or whom he or she sees, often as a result of jealousy (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Due to the increase of peer influence as a developmental task of adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009), social control, which limits access to peers, can be detrimental. In addition, although her sample was slightly older, Leisring (2013) found that 93% of a sample of heterosexual, undergraduate women had perpetrated some form of social control at least once in their relationships.

Additionally, the reports of social media and texting as a control tactic described by the adolescent fathers in this study are similar to Drauker and Martsolf's (2010) study and helps shed light on a relatively unexplored facet of social control (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). Approximately three-quarters of all American adolescents text, with this being the most common method of communication reported by this age group (Lenhart, 2012). Additionally, 80% of all American adolescents use social media (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2011). Given the cyber presence of adolescents (Lenhart, 2012; Lenhart et al., 2011), forms of abuse and control via text messages and social media are appearing (Zweig et al., 2013). Much of current research has focused on cyberbullying (Tokunaga, 2010); however, given the utilization of cyberbullying as a power tactic intended to hurt another person (Vandebosh & Van Cleemput, 2008), the reports made by the fathers in this study may be an extension of this behavior. This facet of research deserves further study given the salience of texting (Lenhart, 2012) and social media (Lenhart et al., 2011) among adolescents today.

Using the children was another common control tactic that appeared in almost half of all the narratives ($n = 5$). Despite this prevalence, use of a child to maintain control over a partner is a tactic typically found in adult, not adolescent, relationships (Pence & Paymar, 1993), especially as a means to prevent a partner from leaving or to control them post-separation (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006; Hays, 2012; Toews & Bermea, 2015). Similar to the reports made by the fathers in this study, threatening to take children away is a tactic common in relationships where IPV and power and control are present (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Additionally, for couples that have separated, the literature suggests children have also been used to gain access to a former partner,

thereby continuing the abuse following the termination of the relationship (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs [DAIP], 2013; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Toews & Bermea, 2015). Although there exists a gatekeeping relationship between adolescent parents (Herzog et al., 2007), this use of the children is not typically measured in studies specifically examining IPV in adolescent parent relationships (Moore et al., 2007; Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014). Given the frequency with which the fathers in this study reported this tactic, further research on how children are used in adolescent parents' relationships is recommended.

In addition to the emotional abuse, social control, and use of children reported by adolescent fathers, physical violence also emerged in the narratives. A third of the fathers in this study ($n = 4$) reported experiencing some form of physical violence victimization. This is also consistent with current research that has found high rates of physical abuse perpetration among adolescent mothers (Moore et al., 2007; Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014; Toews et al., 2011). Additionally, the range of violent tactics reported by the fathers in this study was similar to those described by both male and female perpetrators in Moore and colleagues' (2007) study. All fathers in this study who reported experiencing physical abuse also reported experiencing various forms of emotional abuse, such as yelling and belittling. This is consistent with other research, which found physical violence coincided with emotional abuse in adolescent relationships (Nicodemus et al., 2011; Sears et al., 2007; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014).

In addition to the forms of violence and control discussed by the fathers, relationship dynamics that emerged in the study helped shed light on IPV victimization experienced by adolescent fathers. To illustrate, due to the importance of peers during

adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009), their involvement in the conflict is unsurprising and supports previous research (Adelman and Kil, 2007; Stephenson, Martsolf, & Draucker, 2013). Families were also a source of third party conflict in the narratives. Just as with peers, fathers reported victimization by the family of the mother of his child. Although some research exists discussing in-laws as additional perpetrators in abusive and controlling relationships, it focuses on adult, married couples (Agoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007). Thus, further research is needed on how the grandparents influence the adolescent parent relationships, including those who are no longer together, but who co-parent.

However, reports of third-party involvement extended beyond the mother's social circle. The fathers also reported that their friends and family became involved in their conflict with the mothers of their children. However, much of the research that exists in this light discusses third parties as either taking part in perpetration (Adelman & Kil, 2007; Agoff et al., 2007; Stephenson et al., 2012) or as sources of help (Douglas & Hines, 2007; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2007). A possible explanation for this level of involvement lies in the gender of the third party; that is, many of the fathers reported female friends and family members, as opposed to male friends and family, becoming involved. A proposed explanation for these reports is that having a female fight the fight is a more socially sanctioned form of retaliation. Given the fact that male violence against females is not condoned by many adolescents (Hertzog & Rowley, 2014; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Sears et al., 2006), this addition of third parties could serve as a method of attempting to end abuse without resorting to violence against their female partners themselves.

Another dynamic of interest that emerged from the narratives were the fathers' discussion of how they would actively avoid conflict with the mother of their child. They reported their motives for doing so were either out of fear of escalation of conflict or fear of losing access to their children. The reports made by eight of the fathers that they would not disagree with the mother of their child, for some even after the relationship had ended, in order to avoid the tactics described above indicated that these power and control tactics were effective.

Of the four fathers who had ended their relationships with the mothers of their children, three of them did not report that it was because of violence; instead they discussed how they had simply grown tired of and given up on their relationship. This is in contrast to much of the current literature describing women's experiences leaving violent and controlling relationships, in which violence plays a role (Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001) and the decision to leave is an active process (Burke et al., 2001; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). However, given the difficulties cited by the fathers to leave their relationships, as well as the reasons they gave for leaving, further research is needed in order to understand adolescent fathers' stay-leave decision making.

Messages About Gender and IPV

Another important finding of this study was the discussion of gender and abusive relationships. The desires to adhere to traditional gender roles described by many of the fathers in this study provided support for Gender Schema Theory (1981). There is also support for the Gender Intensification Hypothesis (1983), as these participants discussed masculinity in the context of fatherhood, an identity they gained during adolescence.

Specifically, the fathers described a desire to financially support their child as well as the mother of their child.

Adherence to these traditional gender roles, such as those described by the fathers in this study, has been associated with male perpetration of IPV towards females (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; McDermott & Lopez, 2013; Moore, Stuart, McNulty, Addis, Cordova, & Temple, 2008). In these instances, the male's need to exercise power over a female partner may turn violent (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 1995). The messages many of the fathers received about the "need to control" the mother of his child is certainly representative of these dynamics and is descriptive of Machismo (Arciniega et al., 2008). However, the fathers in this study did not report being the main perpetrators of control and violence in their relationships. This could be attributed to the fact that it was not directly asked during the interviews; yet, none of the fathers reported finding the use of physical abuse against the mother of their child acceptable. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the fathers were part of a relationship education program and, as a result, may be either less accepting of violence and control than their peers or less likely to report it. Additionally, despite the messages of Machismo directed at the fathers in this study, the ideal masculinity described by the fathers was more in line with Caballerismo, in which the male is more emotionally expressive, involved with his family, and exhibits less violence, yet is still the head of the household (Arciniega et al., 2008).

Although research suggests that adolescents, such as those in this study, typically do not condone the use of violent and controlling relationship behaviors, they often report greater leniency towards female perpetrated violence than male perpetrated violence (Hertzog & Rowley, 2014; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Sears et al., 2006). This idea was

mirrored in the fathers' narratives. However, given that traditional masculine norms have been associated with aggression and social dominance (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006), and males are thought of as more powerful given their size (Hamby & Jackson, 2010), a possible explanation for the seemingly incongruent presentation of ideas in the abusive experiences of male IPV victims lies in traditional gender roles. The literature suggests that female perpetrated abuse is allowed to occur because of the traditional belief that males should maintain control of their female partners (Love & Richards, 2013; Stephenson et al., 2011). This form of violence is more acceptable due to the fact that it is often considered less severe than male perpetrated violence (e.g. Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Hodell et al., 2014; Rhatigan et al., 2011; Stephenson et al., 2011) and that female perpetrated violence is considered a source of embarrassment (Sears et al., 2006). This is supported by the messages fathers reported receiving, in which they were told to "control" their girlfriends as well as when they reported that they did not want to disclose violence because they felt others expected them to control their partner.

Perceptions of Victimization

These standards lead to both minimization and victim blaming by both the fathers as well as those who knew about the control and abuse. To illustrate, four fathers reported minimizing their experiences while three described feelings of self-blame. The reactions of others support this, such as the three fathers who reported victim blaming by family, peers, and school officials. This could be due to the cultural norm that masculinity is associated with dominance (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006), and many of the fathers described receiving the message that they are expected to be able to dominate and control their partners. When they are unable to do so, males tend to receive low levels of sympathy

because the control and abuse was considered their fault or not a serious matter (Hodell, 2014; Weisz et al., 2007). The reaction Isaac received from his friends when he talked about how the mother of his child controlled him, “I don’t know how you can deal with all that,” is a perfect illustration of this idea.

In their disclosure decisions, the fathers reported greater feelings of comfort in speaking to their peers than to their family about the violence and control in their relationship. Given that adolescence is a developmental period marked by decreased dependence on the familial system and an increased reliance on peers (Brown & Larson, 2009), it is not surprising that the fathers in this study reported disclosing to peers over family (Weisz et al., 2007). However, although many of the fathers discussed disclosing to a close friend, they did not share their experiences with larger peer groups. This could be attributed to the desire to maintain a masculine appearance because emotional expressiveness among males is considered feminine to many in late adolescence (Way, 2013). The descriptions of the fathers’ disclosure decision-making illuminate the need for more research related to the experiences of adolescent males, especially those with children.

The fathers’ discussion of experiencing violence and conflict in relationships outside of the ones with the mother of their child gave support for social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Although research exists linking violence in the family of origin and subsequent victimization (Conchran et al., 2011; Tyler et al., 2011), such as that described by the fathers in this study, the fathers also described violence between peers as well. Although peer violence is typically associated with violence perpetration (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Boeringer et al., 1991), Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that males who

were victims of IPV were likely to be friends with other male victims. However, the fathers in this study reported being perpetrators of violence in some contexts, such as gang violence, but victims in others, such as with the mother of his child. Additionally, another reported violence between the mother of his child and a close female friend, a relationship in which the father was neither the victim nor the perpetrator. Although this falls outside the realm of current literature, a possible explanation lies in Social learning theory (Bandura et al., 1961). As fathers are exposed to violence in their lives outside of their relationships with the mothers of their children, violence and conflict become increasingly acceptable (Bandura et al., 1961). For example, of the four fathers who reported the physical abuse, three had disclosed the greatest amounts of violence in families of origin as well as in peer groups. In addition, one father reported that because he had never seen violence in their families of origin, he did not feel it was acceptable to use violence against his partner or child. Although this is a contrasting experience to many of the other fathers' narratives, it also supports social learning theory in that he did not condone the acceptability of violence given that he had never seen it modeled.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Although this study contributes to the limited amount of literature examining the experiences of ethnic minority adolescent fathers as the victims of IPV in their relationships with the mothers of their children, there are a few limitations. First, given the limited sample of White and African-American fathers, it is not possible to determine the cultural influences on these fathers' experiences of IPV victimization. However, this is a potential direction for further research with a more diverse sample. Second, the study relied on self-report and the fathers' perceptions of their relationships with the mothers of

their children; thus, the findings could be limited by an individual's construction of the events, making it difficult to discern the context or the mothers' intentions. Third, given that the interviewer was female, the data could also be affected by social desirability, as male participants may be reluctant to disclose instances of their own violence perpetration in their relationships. Fourth, the population was currently enrolled in *Strengthening Relationships/Strengthening Families*, a relationship education program. As a result their perceptions on IPV may differ from adolescent fathers who had not participated.

Despite these limitations, these findings have implications for further studies of ethnic minority adolescent fathers as the victims of IPV. First, given the salience of peers and family in the fathers' narratives, as having both direct involvements in the dyadic conflict as well as facilitating the culture of conflict and violence, further investigation is needed into the roles played by both family and peers. Along these lines, many of the fathers described how they felt socially controlled, especially through technology. Given the importance of peers in adolescent development, further research should include experiences of social control including texting and social media, specifically. Although use of the children is seen as a control tactic in adult relationships, it has not frequently been explored in adolescent parent relationships. The reports made by the fathers in this study indicate that this is an especially effective control tactic and should be given more attention by both researchers and relationship educators who serve this population. Additionally, this study gives specific insight into the role played by gender in the experiences of ethnic minority adolescent fathers. This sheds light on how this population perceives their experiences and how professionals working with them can provide

adequate counsel to meet their needs. To illustrate, relationship and family educators should work to counsel both males and females not only on healthy relationship dynamics, but also towards less stereotyped gender ideals and a more egalitarian perspective. They should also educate adolescent parents regarding the consequences of using children as a control tactic and help them establish a co-parenting plan regardless of whether or not the couple is still together.

The adolescent fathers' narratives provide insight into an understudied facet of relationship violence (Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews & Yazedjian, 2014; Toews et al., 2011). Their descriptions of how the mothers of their children used emotionally and physically abusive behaviors as social control and their child can help researchers as well as practitioners understand how adolescent fathers experience IPV. Additionally, their discussion of relationship dynamics helps shed light on these experiences. Finally, the fathers' reports of the messages they receive about gender and violence allow for a rich understanding of how these messages influence these fathers' perceptions of their experiences and provide insight regarding prevention and intervention strategies.

APPENDIX SECTION

Tell me about the relationship with the mother of your children.

Are you still in the relationship?

If so, for how long?

If not, how long was the relationship?

What was your main reason for ending the relationship?

Are you currently co-parenting?

What is/was your relationship like?

(If in a relationship) How do you feel about your partner?

How did you feel about your partner when you first started going out?

How has that changed?

All couples argue, it's part of being in a relationship. What kinds of things do/did you fight about?

Tell me about a time when you and your partner had an argument.

What was it like when you argued?

How did you feel when you two had an argument?

How do/did you think those arguments typically start?

Who, in your opinion, is/was usually "at fault" for the arguments?

Do you feel like these arguments ever got out of control?

What kinds of things does/did she say/do during the arguments?

Why do you think she said/did that?

What kinds of things do/did you say/do during these arguments?

Why do you think you said/ did that?

You said your partner _____. Had that ever happened before?

You said your partner _____. What did you think when she did this?

How did you feel?

Did you feel scared when your partner _____?

How did it change your relationship with your partner?

What do you think others, like your friends, would say if they knew she did this?

What about your family?

How do you think other guys your age would respond if their girlfriends _____?

Did you tell someone about what happened?

What did they say when you told them? Who?

If not, why not?

How did they respond?

Who did you live with growing up (parents, grandparents, ect.)?

What is your relationship with your family like now?

Were your parents married?

What was their relationship like?

How often did they fight?

How did they resolve conflicts?

How did your dad treat your mom?

How did your mom treat your dad?

Everyone's idea of a perfect relationship is different. What do you think a perfect relationship looks like?

What are arguments like?

Who works in the relationship?

Who takes care of the kids?

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