EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE USING BRIEF EXPRESSIVE WRITING ESSAYS

Allison Laajala, M.A.

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APPROVED:

Sharon Jenkins, Major Professor
Patricia Kaminski, Committee Member
Danica Slavish, Committee Member
Donald Dougherty, Chair of the Department of Psychology
Albert Bimper, Executive Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

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Non-physical intimate partner violence (NPIPV) is the most pervasive type of abuse, yet literature has predominantly focused on physical IPV victimization. This study employed a mixed-methods design utilizing archival expressive writing data previously collected to identify the presence of NPIPV victimization. Participants wrote about their experience after a relationship dissolution using the expressive writing paradigm. They were asked to share their deepest thoughts and feelings across two sessions. A constructivist grounded theory approach established the theoretical framework for coding the presence of NPIPV acts between romantic partners. Four themes of NPIPV were established (degradation, isolation, control, and jealousy). Disclosure of NPIPV and other themes were also evident in these data. Quantitative analyses assessed changes in participants' psychological distress after completing a brief writing intervention. The intervention increased the likelihood of NPIPV victimization being mentioned from Time 1 to Time 2 writing sessions. This study increases clinical awareness regarding NPIPV by providing insights into this longest-sustained IPV subtype. All participants reported a reduction in avoidance symptoms after completing the writing intervention. Finally, gender continues to complicate this field as researchers must acknowledge both the existence of men's victimization experiences and the greater severity of women's victimization. Clinical implications demonstrate a strength in narrative therapy when processing relationship dissolution particularly when NPIPV victimization is present.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a prevalent social and health concern with long-term effects. IPV is any physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression committed by an intimate partner (Brieding et al., 2015). One in three women and one in four men experience victimization within their lifetimes (Coker et al., 2002). For example, across countries, similar rates are reported: 30-34% of women between the ages of 15-49 report IPV victimization across their lifetime (Muluneh et al., 2021), with most of these women reporting these first encounters before the age of twenty-five (CDC, 2012). Undergraduate college students exhibit similar prevalence rates of IPV (Bushong, 2018; Spadine et al., 2020). However, some research suggests rates as high as 52% for college student lifetime victimization (Fantasia et al., 2018). Within the United States, IPV is the leading cause of physical violence experienced by adults and adolescents (Heyman et al., 2015).

Over the past few decades, research in IPV has extended to include domestic violence, dating violence, marital abuse, partner aggression, and partner violence (Childress et al., 2017; Hines & Douglas, 2015; Hughes et al., 2016). IPV persists as a significant clinical concern across cultures, socio-economic status, gender, and sexuality (Al-Modallal et al., 2001; Bryant-Davis et al., 2010; Haze et al., 2008; Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Lacey et al., 2015; Yoshihama et al., 2009). Considering the universality of IPV, intervention and research directives must recognize that no one type of victim exists.

The universality of IPV is particularly relevant when assessing psychological IPV. Even though research underestimates non-physical abuse (Straus, 1999), the literature suggests it is as pervasive as physical IPV, negatively impacting mental and physical health outcomes (Potter et

al., 2021). Accordingly, psychological sequelae such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic symptoms resulting from psychological abuse occur at equal rates as those caused by physical abuse (Blanco-Ros et al., 2010; Costa & Boteltherio, 2021; Pico-Alfonso et al., 2005).

The purpose of this study was twofold. A mixed-methods analysis was implemented to assess psychological IPV. Using data previously collected by Nowlin (2015), the presence of psychological, non-physical IPV abuse tactics was explored. These data were initially collected following relationship dissolution and data collection took place across two writing sessions. It was designed to provide a possible short-term intervention to address psychological distress that can accompany the termination of a romantic relationship. For this study, it is relevant to explore the data further to assess the presence of non-physical IPV and how this may influence the experience of relationship dissolution and its effects. This phase included finding themes of psychological, non-physical IPV experiences to inform the empirical context of the subtype. Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) informed the theoretical framework for these qualitative analyses (Charmaz, 1996).

The sample was then divided into two groups based on non-physical IPV experiences being present. This was defined based on the mention of non-physical IPV victimization experiences identified during the qualitative analyses. After outlining the non-physical IPV subtype, additional quantitative analyses assessed the effects of Nowlin's (2015) brief writing intervention on participants' psychological well-being based on the presence of psychological, non-physical IPV. These analyses explored changes in psychological distress based on comparing participants with no presence of non-physical IPV and participants mentioning non-physical IPV following relationship dissolution. The following sections will first discuss the IPV literature broadly and then shift to the primary focus on non-physical IPV victimization.

Impacts of IPV

The literature has demonstrated that broad exposure to IPV impacts individuals in several ways. Individuals who experience IPV victimization consistently report a variety of adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, substance use, self-harm, suicidal ideation, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Beydoun, et al., 2017; Cody & Beck, 2014; Lagdon et al., 2014). Individuals who have experienced IPV victimization report experiencing many psychological disorders, citing depression as the most reported disorder (Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; Lagdon et al., 2014; Okuda et al., 2015), and nearly 50% meet the criteria for two or more psychological disorders (Nathanson et al., 2014). Furthermore, the effects of IPV victimization on one's well-being persist after the abusive relationship has ended; for example, Ahmadabadi and colleagues (2020) found that IPV victimization led to an increased risk of developing anxiety and mood disorders over a ten-year study.

IPV victimization frequently co-occurs with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder (Nixon et al., 2004). Individuals who experience multiple forms of IPV victimization (i.e., physical, sexual, and psychological aggression) often demonstrate increased posttraumatic stress symptoms (Yalch & Rickman, 2021). Therefore, IPV victimization consistently puts individuals at a greater risk of experiencing detriments in their overall psychological functioning compared to individuals who never experience IPV (Bonomi et al., 2006; Kamimura et al., 2014).

While the effects of IPV are detrimental, it is often difficult for individuals to leave their violent situation; they report an average of five to seven attempts to leave before successfully ending the relationship (Rich, 2020; Roberts et al., 2008). The difficulty experienced by leaving and returning to an abusive situation multiple times is significant as it highlights the complex

nature of IPV. Some research suggests that abuse tactics such as psychological aggression reinforce individuals to return to their perpetrating romantic partner after repeated attempts to leave (Meyer, 2015). This aspect is essential to highlight, as psychological aggression is considered the most prevalent and earliest form of IPV (Cengic, 2020; Pico-Alfonso et al., 2006; Stylianou, 2018).

IPV encompasses a vast array of harmful abuse tactics. Researchers have worked to understand better the various complexities for the last few decades, including classifying the different kinds of abuse between partners. Ali and colleagues (2016) presented a literature review from 1980-2015 to provide an integrated and up-to-date understanding of the different types of violence. The field covers mainly three types of violence (physical, sexual, and psychological; 2016). Physical violence is using physical acts toward a partner (2016). This subtype includes several acts, including but not limited to slapping, shoving, hitting, choking, or weapon use (Garica et al., 2005). The second type, sexual violence, refers to acts perpetrated by one's partner that have some component related to sex (Ali et al., 2016). Acts that fall under this category include forced sexual intercourse and harming one's partner during sex (World Health Organization, 2014). The final subtype, psychological violence, is behaviors used to control and humiliate one's partner publicly or privately (Ali et al., 2016). Additionally, it is the most prevalent form of IPV and is distinctly different from the first two because of its more subjective nature (Pico-Alfonso, 2005). This subtype is the predominant focus of the paper and is further outlined in later sections.

In most IPV research, the impact of abuse is measured across the three main subtypes, usually conflating the three together. Unfortunately, this creates confusion in the literature as it can become unclear how the different subtypes influence one's psychological functioning.

Furthermore, psychological violence has been defined by researchers in several ways. The nomenclature of this IPV subtype has been quite varied. Previous research has used psychological aggression, emotional abuse, non-physical acts of abuse, verbal abuse, and psychological violence (Bushong, 2018; Dim, 2021; Hughes et al., 2016; Jamess & Mackinnon, 2010). To capture the fullness of this subtype, non-physical IPV (NPIPV) will be used to define this subtype throughout this paper. This was determined as it was the broadest term encompassing the slight nuances of all terms. Additionally, it recognizes the distinct difference from physical acts.

Non-Physical IPV (NPIPV)

The current study highlights the need for intervention efforts to primarily focus on NPIPV. NPIPV is widespread across countries (Heise et al., 2019; Miller, 2006; Stylianou, 2018), with victimization rates as high as 75% for men and 72% for women (Comecanha et al., 2017). NPIPV persists throughout the lifetime; Mezey, Post, and Maxwell (2002) identified that non-physical abuse persists throughout the lifespan, even when physical IPV decreases in incident ratings among older adult populations. NPIPV is a specific set of behaviors used intentionally to subject a romantic partner to consistent abuse that causes impairment to their psychological functioning. It varies by intensity and frequency based on the impact of each behavior on the victim. NPIPV encompasses specific abuse tactics, including degradation, isolation, manipulation, restricting social interactions, controlling behaviors, gaslighting, and dominance (Doyle, 2020; Grace et al., 2020; Karakurt, 2021).

One study found that participants who experienced multiple forms of IPV (physical and non-physical) consistently described NPIPV as their worst experience (Band-Winterstein & Avieli, 2021). NPIPV is also positively correlated to increased illicit drug use and binge drinking

behaviors (Straight et al., 2003). Posttraumatic symptoms are some of the most prevalent adverse outcomes following an NPIPV victimization experience; in one multi-site shelter study, after controlling for other forms of IPV, 78% of participants experienced posttraumatic stress symptoms due to NPIPV (Dokkedahl et al., 2021). In another study, NPIPV victimization persisted as a significant contributing factor to the development of PTSD (Mechanic et al., 2008; Pico-Alfonso, 2005). Furthermore, PTSD symptoms resulting from NPIPV victimization did not differ across genders (Ramos et al., 2020).

Further physical health difficulties resulting from NPIPV victimization include sleep disturbances and somatization (Pattinson, 2020; Rose, 2019). More specifically, specific NPIPV tactics (i.e., verbal insults, dominance, isolation) were the leading cause of somatic complaints compared to all other forms of IPV (Rich, 2020). In addition to increased sleep difficulty and somatic complaints, NPIPV may also impact women's reproductive health and wellness (Grace et al., 2020). These data suggest that NPIPV victimization affects individuals with various negative mental and physical health outcomes.

Furthermore, NPIPV committed by a romantic partner causes lasting mental and physical health impacts that extend beyond the relationship and throughout one's life (Queen et al., 2009). These negative impacts may endure for years, causing lasting impairments in interpersonal, occupational, and family functioning (Exner-Cortens et al., 2013). Recognizing the severe impact of NPIPV victimization is imperative when formulating targeted intervention strategies. However, to examine intervention strategies, research must first acknowledge the difficulty in conceptualizing this IPV subtype.

Conceptualization of NPIPV

Researchers agree on the impact of NPIPV and recognize its existence as a significant

form of IPV. A review from 2006 to 2012 by Dillon and colleagues (2012) outlined the impact of psychological IPV. However, NPIPV is poorly studied compared to other forms of IPV (Carton & Egan, 2017) because it is more challenging to identify than physical or sexual IPV perpetration. Researchers have differing views on the definition and conceptualization of NPIPV between romantic partners. For instance, some posit that identifying specific behaviors as subtypes of NPIPV and applying an objective measurement system similar to how physical IPV data is collected is the best research practice (Myers, 2020).

Overwhelmingly, survey data dominates the study area, and self-report measures rely on individuals to disclose their own NPIPV experiences. Even though measures such as the Conflicts Tactics Scale and the Multi-Dimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse have proven their clinical utility, they only collect data based on the question items that bind them (Godfrey et al., 2021; Maldanado et al., 2020; Straus et al., 1996; Waltermaurer, 2005). While it is essential to highlight the specific behaviors of NPIPV, research that examines the nuances of these tactics may yield more valuable data. For example, addressing themes of NPIPV and the context of perpetration may yield more effective results as it differs from the more objective physical act of violence (e.g., hitting, punching). Researchers can achieve this by employing qualitative designs (Faust, 2021).

Mixed methods designs, including qualitative data, may better capture the experience of NPIPV victimization. McCauley and colleagues (2016) explored the subjectivity of NPIPV by accessing data collected from an online social media movement, “#MaybeHeDoesntHitYou,” to identify how individuals conceptualize their experiences of NPIPV. Their research found themes such as economic control, coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation, and degradation as ways NPIPV is perpetrated (McCauley et al., 2018). Data like these suggest that qualitative

exploration may be more effective in surveying NPIPV. For example, one qualitative analysis examined as many as 35 behaviors that define NPIPV (Lykhina, 2013). Such research has also documented social isolation, manipulative control, abandonment, and financial power as other tactics that fall under the umbrella of NPIPV (Burnett, 2020; Faust, 2021). When conceptualizing NPIPV, it is important to note the defining features of this subtype and how such features are carried out within an abusive relationship. Different models explore the prolonged exposure of NPIPV and how it relates to other IPV subtypes.

Theoretical Models of NPIPV

There are many models within the IPV literature, including the cycle theory of violence (Walker, 1979), the Duluth power and control wheel (Pence, 1982), the systemic relational violence model (McLeod et al., 2021), the three degree model of non-physical abuse (James & MacKinnon, 2010), and the gender symmetry model of violence (Strauss & Giles, 1988). They are similar in that they all address the complex nature of NPIPV but differ in the distinction given to NPIPV compared to other forms of IPV. However, the distinguishing feature of the gender symmetry model (Straus & Giles, 1988) views IPV as a bi-directional relationship where each partner perpetrates toward the other. Each of these models will be presented, highlighting the importance of studying NPIPV as it is the predominant form of IPV that persists between relationally violent couples.

Cycle Theory of Violence

One of the first models attempting to explain relational violence, the Cycle theory of violence (Walker, 1979), suggested that violence occurs predictably through three stages (i.e., tension building, physically violent incident, and reconciliation). The model posits that NPIPV occurs during the first tension-building stage, during which victims attempt to appease or placate

perpetrators to avoid physically violent acts from being committed. The second stage occurs when these attempts fail, and an isolated physically violent abuse incident occurs. Finally, the third stage incorporates a period of relief where no IPV perpetration is committed (physical or NPIPV). This final stage also highlights reconciliation with one's romantic partner.

A major weakness of this model is its reliance on a linear cause-and-effect sequence that does not consider how IPV may vary within different relationships. Additionally, Walker predominately focuses on the significance of physical IPV. Nonetheless, it was considered groundbreaking at its inception as it was the first model to explore the intricate nature of IPV.

Duluth Model

Another early model exploring IPV, the theoretical framework that formulated the Duluth model, suggested that NPIPV is a precursor to physical acts of aggression (Pence et al., 1982). The Duluth model argues that NPIPV is how perpetrators (predominately men) exercise power and control using violence toward their partners. This model still assesses IPV perpetration from the linear perspective, with NPIPV as a precursor to physical IPV. However, in contrast to the cycle theory of violence (Walker, 1979), in this model, NPIPV is pervasive and the major subtype perpetrated (Pence et al., 1982). The Duluth model receives much criticism due to its exclusion of women as perpetrators. This aspect of the model is further outlined in later sections of the paper, discussing the impact of gender.

As the two foundational theories within the IPV literature, the Duluth model (Pence, 1982) and the cycle theory of violence (Walker, 1979) have influenced the field in several ways. For example, further research has posited that NPIPV should be understood as part of a continuum of IPV when assessing multiple types of abuse (Myers, 2020) because NPIPV often precedes physical forms of violence (Peatee, 2018). It can serve as an early indicator of future

physical or sexual IPV. One study discovered that after individuals perpetrate a certain level (i.e., higher mean scores on a self-report measure) of NPIPV, they are 70-85% more likely to engage in physically aggressive acts (Salis et al., 2014). Similar findings by Outlaw (2009) demonstrated that when non-physical aggressive actions (emotional, social, or economic) increase, perpetrators are two to four times more likely to engage in physical abuse toward their romantic partners.

Further, individuals who report physical IPV victimization alongside NPIPV experience intensified versions of each IPV subtype (Hacialiefendioglu et al., 2021). If this conceptualization of IPV behaviors occurring on a continuum is supported, NPIPV may serve as an early identification of future more physically severe IPV victimization (Domenech del Rio & Garcia del Valle, 2016; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2008). Individuals may have the maximum benefit from interventions that focus on NPIPV. Emphasizing this subtype of IPV is imperative when assessing the treatment effects of a brief writing task that can aid in victim recovery.

Systemic Relational Violence Model

Another model suggests NPIPV is not only an early indicator of physical IPV but is a continuous and constant form of victimization in relationally violent couples. McLeod and colleagues (2021) argue that if they occur together, IPV is continuous, with physically aggressive acts as enforcement and NPIPV as a controlling baseline behavior committed by perpetrators. That is, NPIPV is perpetrated consistently to maintain control over one's romantic partner and when this power differential is challenged physical IPV is enacted to enforce control (McLeod et al., 2021). This abuse style is evidenced by their systemic relational violence model (2021). The main distinction between the previous two models (i.e., Duluth; cycle theory) and the systemic relational violence model is that McLeod and colleagues (2021) argue that more attention should be placed on NPIPV as it may be more chronic than distinct acts of physical aggression.

Additionally, this model also opposes previously noted theories as it does not incorporate periods of relief, such as the honeymoon period (Ali & Naylor, 2013; El-Mohandes et al., 2011; McLeod et al., 2021; Walker, 1979). If IPV is indeed continual, most of a victim's experience may be the controlling baseline of NPIPV (McLeod et al., 2021). Therefore, considering a model that highlights NPIPV as the driving force of IPV may be more beneficial than seeing it as a secondary experience of physical IPV.

Three-Degree Model of Non-Physical Abuse

This dimensional model considers various factors when investigating NPIPV (James & MacKinnon, 2010). First, James and MacKinnon (2010) suggest NPIPV behaviors vary in severity and exist in varying forms, with not all types being experienced equally. For example, insulting or belittling a partner is a single event, but isolating them from their social support system is longer and more sustained. This model also accounts for the intentions of the perpetrating partner, the perceived impact of the victimization experience, and how often the NPIPV is utilized (James & MacKinnon, 2010). James and MacKinnon (2010) suggested that literature requires more understanding of the different types of non-physical acts of IPV. This three-degree model organizes the subtype into "verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse" which may aid in understanding the different tactics of NPIPV.

This model distinctly differs from the previous three because it focuses only on NPIPV. Rather than seeing this IPV subtype functioning within the experience of physical acts of IPV, it suggests non-physical acts against a romantic partner are impactful enough to be considered detrimental to one's psychological functioning despite the presence or absence of physical IPV (2010). For example, controlling behaviors such as intimidation and isolation may be more impactful than degradation as they are persistent and involve prolonged exposure (Hancock,

2017). Specific psychologically abusive acts may also be experienced differently based on each victim's evaluation of and reaction to the NPIPV experience (DeHart, Follingstad, & Fields, 2010).

Gender Symmetry Model

The gender symmetry model differs from the previously discussed models as it focuses on the reciprocity of perpetration (Straus & Gelles, 1988). This model suggests it is not focusing on IPV subtypes but on the motivations behind aggressive acts toward one's partner that are important. For example, a critical review of the IPV literature outlined that when IPV is defined by non-physical and physically abusive acts toward one's partner, the data is relatively even with both men and women perpetrating (Esquivel-Santovena et al., 2013). The model is in direct contrast to the Duluth model (Pence, 1982) and will be discussed more thoroughly in later sections of the paper exploring the impact of gender when studying IPV.

Overall, NPIPV is complex, and these models suggest a need for a more integrated approach when assessing this subtype of IPV. For example, NPIPV may identify specific abuse tactics and the situational factors reinforcing their usage. Given that IPV occurs predominately in private spaces (i.e., behind closed doors), the impact, frequency, and intensity are not easily understood (Hamel, 2020). IPV research often faces several impediments when assessing NPIPV. Some of these obstructions include societal relationship norms, gender role expectations, and overall perceptions of non-physical IPV.

Challenges Affecting NPIPV Research

Social perceptions of NPIPV affect how it is studied. Social schemas like romanticizing power imbalances within intimate relationships are evident throughout literature and media (Maas & Bonomi, 2020). The sentiment of romantic love surviving any obstacle often can follow

a pattern similarly outlined by the cycle of abuse usually characterized as a violent relational couple (Hayes, 2014). Furthermore, more objective physical forms of IPV (e.g., hitting, punching, choking) may overshadow the severity of experiencing NPIPV victimization as it does not cause acute physical injury. For example, one study assessing undergraduates' IPV perceptions found physical abuse more severe than NPIPV (Wilson, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge these perceptions as they may hinder prevention efforts targeting these earlier forms of IPV victimization.

There has been some evidence that challenging these social perceptions has positive outcomes. Using college samples, primary and secondary prevention programming providing psychoeducation, conflict resolution, and communication skill-building has successfully reduced NPIPV (Spadine et al., 2020; Webermann et al., 2020). Similar interventions have also successfully lowered psychologically aggressive acts toward a romantic partner in community sampling (Bouchard & Wong, 2020). These intervention studies suggest that providing an individual with the appropriate tools to challenge IPV perceptions can reduce victimization rates.

Another aspect that influences the perception of NPIPV is how individuals assess their victimization. There is often a disconnect in researching NPIPV as it may be challenging to recognize it as a form of abuse perpetrated by one's partner. Furthermore, individuals may struggle in their capacity to identify indirect behaviors (i.e., non-physical aggressive behaviors) as abuse but still experience the effects of fear, hopelessness, or humiliation (Chadambuka & Warria, 2018; Karakurt, 2021). Individuals can minimize their partners' perpetration by justifying or denying the behavior that occurs (Arriaga et al., 2018). The frequency of NPIPV and physical IPV occurrences increased the likelihood of recognizing a romantic partner's behaviors as abusive; however, individuals often experienced multiple episodes of IPV before

achieving that insight (Rodriguez-Franco et al., 2012). Qualitative research comprised of interviews has identified various forms of NPIPV that many individuals could not identify until after leaving an abusive romantic relationship (Giordano, 2001). Working with individuals to reflect on their previous IPV relationships may encourage a shift in their perception about the abuse endured.

Research has identified positive and negative outcomes resulting from recognizing one's victimization due to NPIPV. For example, one study found that after participants completed a group therapy trial, a significant theme emerged: hearing others' histories helped them recognize abusive behaviors perpetrated by their partners in their lives (Tutty et al., 2015). Additional outcomes included reducing isolation and gaining more compassion for themselves (Tutty et al., 2015). However, identifying NPIPV can increase negative mental health impacts such as depression and anxiety compared to clinical samples that do not acknowledge their victimization (Peatee, 2018). As such, the effects of recognizing NPIPV as part of an intervention strategy are still unclear as there is little study on this topic (Clements & Ogle, 2009; Clements et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, Minto, Masser, and Louis (2020) argued that the failure to identify specific non-physical IPV behaviors as abusive causes people to stay in such relationships longer. The importance of identifying abuse tactics committed by their partner may outweigh adverse outcomes as it can encourage individuals to leave their abusive partners. Such perceptions support further exploration of the impact of gender on studying the phenomenon of NPIPV.

Gender Impacts on NPIPV Research

Gender impacts the IPV literature in many ways. For one example, traditional gender role expectations may collectively influence people's perceptions of IPV regardless of previous victimization experiences, affecting prevention efforts. In particular, when individuals detect

NPIPV perpetration, it is often dismissed or considered more acceptable than other forms of violence (Masci & Sanderson, 2017) unless the NPIPV is against women (DeHart et al., 2010). Two theoretical models have attempted to explore the influence of gender in IPV research.

The Duluth model (Pence, 1982) and the gender symmetry model (Straus & Gelles, 1988) emphasize gender. However, these two models are distinct and different, with the former focusing on violence against women and the latter arguing the importance of recognizing that both men and women perpetrate IPV. Researchers may benefit from recognizing the strengths of each model and using them concurrently to reach the same goal for treatment and prevention efforts effectively. For example, exploring bidirectional IPV (i.e., gender symmetry) has found that women sustain more harmful outcomes than their partners, with an increased severity when partners mutually aggress (Temple et al., 2005; Whitaker et al., 2007). Studies such as these suggest that violence against women is severe (Duluth Model; Pence, 1982) and that both romantic partners have the potential to mutually agress (Straus & Gelles, 1988).

Interestingly, one review of the research has suggested that gender does affect outcomes related to IPV victimization. Caldwell, Swan, and Woodbrown (2012) argued that researchers cannot ignore the connection between power and gender. A physical power differential related to men's overall greater size and strength affects victimization outcomes when evaluating the severity of IPV. Research has also documented that women tend to sustain more significant injuries and other adverse health outcomes because of these biological differences between men and women (Gagnon & DePrince, 2017). Violence toward women is also more likely to result in severe physical injury leading to medical intervention than for men (Archer, 2000; Ross, 2012).

Women are at a greater risk for victimization though it does not make them immune to perpetrating IPV. Focusing on male-to-female perpetration models (i.e., Duluth model) ignores

gender symmetry, which may hinder policy and treatment initiatives (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). Gender roles influence these intervention efforts as individuals consistently recognize women as victims and men as perpetrators (Eisikovits & Bailey, 2011). Several studies have demonstrated that participants consistently label women as victims and men as perpetrators even when both perpetrate toward one another (Hine et al., 2020; Wilson & Smirles, 2022). One example of this phenomenon assessed undergraduates' IPV perceptions, attributing more responsibility to male perpetrators even when women who perpetrated were also presented (Wilson, 2020). Consistently, participants perceive male IPV perpetrators as more responsible for their aggressive actions while dismissing their female counterparts' abusive actions (Capezza et al., 2017). Consistent evidence indicates that IPV occurs bi-directionally, though the sole victim and the sole perpetrator status is a persisting idea (Fernandez et al., 2019; Winstok & Straus, 2014). Findings such as these highlight how prevention efforts should focus on both partners (Bates, 2016). In the context of psychologically aggressive acts, the distinction of gender and its effect on outcome severity may not be as easily understood.

While women are more likely to report NPIPV (Spadine et al., 2020), men also experience NPIPV victimization (e.g., verbal aggression, controlling behaviors) and physical IPV victimization (Dim, 2021). Men experience victimization from manipulation abuse tactics, an identified form of NPIPV, by their romantic partners (Carson, 2019; Dim, 2020). Men who report NPIPV victimization also demonstrate symptoms of PTSD (Vinayak & Safariolyaei 2015). Additionally, men with a reported history of NPIPV victimization are at an increased risk of developing an anxiety disorder (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020). These data are essential to highlight as the male-to-female perpetration model does not consider these victim experiences of men.

Considering the difficulty in defining NPIPV, adding gender perceptions may further complicate research directives. Assessing qualitative data collected using an expressive writing task can aid in identifying victimization by assessing the IPV experiences of both men and women rather than stereotyping women as victims and men as perpetrators (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). To assess the distinctive nature of this subtype of IPV, exploring its influence on relationship dissolution through an expressive writing paradigm may provide further insight.

Expressive Writing

Expressive writing may improve mental health characteristics (e.g., better emotional processing and interpersonal functioning; Godbold, 2019). For example, this intervention modality can be beneficial in reducing depressive symptoms such as rumination (Gortner et al., 2006). Previous research has successfully utilized expressive writing data to conduct secondary analyses (Jenkins et al., 2023; Jenkins et al., 2013). For this study, previously collected expressive writing data by Nowlin (2015) was sourced to explore the effects of NPIPV following relationship dissolution. Individuals terminating an abusive relationship compared to individuals terminating a non-abusive relationship may process such experiences differently.

Pennebaker (1997) outlined a basic writing paradigm to confront negative life experiences by engaging in a 15-20 minute narrative exercise across multiple sessions to reduce distress (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker 2010). Expressive writing is a narrative task in which individuals can explore their emotional experiences and thought processes by writing about adverse life events. This paradigm is implemented by encouraging writers to approach the task openly and with minimum editing or self-censorship.

Research has outlined that expressive writing often reduces psychopathology and adverse physical health outcomes (Frattaroli, 2006; Pennebaker, 1997) and may positively impact

psychological functioning after processing traumatic histories (Barr, 2017; Gortner et al., 2006; Pennebaker, 1989; Travagin et al., 2015). However, there is also evidence that this therapeutic intervention is ineffective in some writers' psychological well-being (Holmes et al., 2007; Pennebaker, 1993). For instance, different meta-analyses assessing the efficacy of expressive writing for trauma experiences have found little to no effect on an individual's psychological health, such as reducing depressive symptomology (Mogk et al., 2006; Reinhold et al., 2017). Further research on this intervention is warranted.

This intervention may improve participants' psychological functioning following relationship dissolution. Previous research has examined the effects of such interventions on IPV populations, especially when NPIPV was suspected (Band-Winterstein & Avieli, 2021). Koopman and colleagues (2005) found that women with a history of NPIPV victimization had reduced symptoms of depression after participating in expressive writing sessions. An expressive writing exercise can provide a brief intervention experience for the individual by reducing negative mental health symptoms (Baar, 2017). Brief interventions may aid individuals in terminating relationships with their abuser for good as they begin to process these complex trauma histories. The current study assessed changes in psychological distress after completing the writing task with NPIPV status formulated using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1996).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Within the IPV literature, grounded theories have informed the lasting impact of trauma experiences from IPV, help-seeking behaviors of victims of NPIPV, and cross-cultural perceptions of IPV (Baird et al., 2019; Faust, 2021). Qualitative data collected can strengthen the knowledge of NPIPV, as it is more covert and subjective than physical violence (Burnett, 2020;

Faust, 2021). Researchers can use these data by applying grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996). Grounded theory has also provided further insight into complex dynamics often related to IPV to provide better support for recovery from victimization experiences (Wilson et al., 2020).

CGT encourages researchers to review literature with a specific goal related to the study area (Charmaz, 2006; Rakhmawati, 2019). In the context of this study, outlining how previous research has identified NPIPV was the specified goal as it aided the preliminary construction of the coding manual. When using CGT, the literature review adheres to traditional research methods by focusing on a particular research question rather than relying on what emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Kenny & Fourie, 2015). As such, the constructivist grounded theory informed the qualitative procedures of this study by accounting for researchers' interactions with these data and establishing an appropriate coding approach (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2008; Rakhmawati, 2019).

Research previously outlined by Faust (2021) has used CGT to explore help-seeking behaviors for individuals who experienced NPIPV. As part of their data analysis plan, they analyzed interview data by organizing themes based on the order in which they emerged from the data. Such themes were formed when participants used similar wording to describe an idea. These each created an insight into the specific abuse tactics disclosed by individuals seeking services (2021). A coding team then reviewed identified themes for the reliability of the coding procedure (2021).

Charmaz (1996) recognized how researchers need to accept a certain amount of flexibility when assessing qualitative data. Thus, the two-tier coding procedure of CGT utilizes an initial, open coding directive followed by the refocused axial coding stage that establishes recurring themes that motivate further investigation (Thai et al., 2012). Baird and colleagues

(2019) outlined that their data collection procedure involved extensive use of memos. These memos were kept to create a thorough description of the data. Initial coding procedures focused on a line-by-line approach to test the researchers' assumptions. During the final coding stage, constant comparisons were made between participants and different points of data collection. This process was completed when no new information could be identified, meeting theoretical saturation (Baird et al., 2019). Researchers do not fit these data into the coding system but actively shape and inform the coding procedures (Charmaz, 2006). CGT will assess themes of NPIPV presented through the expressive writing responses with the potential of providing empirical context that can then be used to quantify the grouping variable for further analyses.

Study Rationale

NPIPV is a foundational element of IPV, and research must focus on this abuse subtype. Using CGT to construct the basic theoretical framework, participants' writing responses amassed through an expressive writing task modeled after Pennebaker's (1997) paradigm exploring relationship dissolution (Nowlin, 2015) were coded for NPIPV. This information may uncover the empirical origins or context of NPIPV. A provisional composition outlined eight characteristics of psychological aggression previously defined by the IPV literature as the basis of possible NPIPV to be categorized (e.g., denigration, manipulation, isolation, restricting social interactions, gaslighting, dominance, threats, and controlling behaviors). These eight behaviors were distinguished after a preliminary review of the data based on the knowledge developed by an informed literature review (Godfrey et al., 2021; McCauley et al., 2018; Pence et al., 1982) and previous findings through qualitative (Faust, 2021) and quantitative research using self-report scales (Maldanado et al., 2020).

This study employed a mixed-methods analysis. First, the expressive writing responses

were examined to assess the presence of NPIPV acts between romantic partners. Based on this examination, participants were organized into two groups (participants not reporting NPIPV and participants reporting NPIPV). The CGT framework outlined the grouping variable of NPIPV status by exploring themes of NPIPV. Additional analyses examined changes in NPIPV status across Time 1 and Time 2 writing sessions. Research has demonstrated that participants can better identify victimization experiences over time, especially after terminating the relationship (Giordano, 2001). Therefore, over time more participants will describe NPIPV that was present in their relationship. Next, quantitative analyses assessed pretest and posttest changes in psychological distress and posttraumatic symptom reports after completing the expressive writing task. These analyses could further the literature by clarifying if positive changes occur after completing a brief writing intervention for individual with experience with NPIPV victimization as a potentially impactful and accessible intervention.

Exploratory analysis also examined return-to-abuser behaviors after completing the expressive writing task. Individuals exposed to IPV perpetrated by their partners often struggle to terminate the relationship, making several attempts to leave before finally doing so permanently. However, within the expressive writing research, recovery from IPV may be possible if positive outcomes result in better psychological functioning.

Hypothesis 1: The number of participants disclosing codable incidents of NPIPV victimization during the expressive writing intervention will increase from Time 1 to Time 2.

Hypothesis 2: NPIPV participants who completed the expressive writing paradigm will report a significant reduction in overall psychological symptoms outlined by the total scores on the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-58; Derogatis, 1974) and Impact of Events (IES; Horowitz et al., 1979) compared to non-NPIPV participants who completed the writing task.

Hypothesis 3: After participating in a brief writing intervention, participants mentioning NPIPV will report a significant reduction in psychological symptom distress outlined by the HSCL subscales (somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety) compared to non-IPV participants.

Hypothesis 4: After participating in a brief writing intervention, participants disclosing NPIPV will report a significant reduction in post-traumatic symptoms outlined by the IES subscales (avoidance and intrusion) compared to non-IPV participants.

Exploratory Hypothesis 1: After participating in a brief writing intervention, NPIPV participants will report differently about returning to their partners compared to non-NPIPV participants based on the return to partner question from the relationship demographics questionnaire.

Exploratory Hypothesis 2: Research posits that IPV occurs on a continuum, with NPIPV as an early indicator of physical acts of IPV (Domenech del Rio & Garcia del Valle, 2016; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2008; Peatee, 2018). Written responses that include both physical and NPIPV will be compared to NPIPV-only participants and non-IPV participants assessing changes in psychological distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Exploratory Hypothesis 3: Acknowledgment of IPV victimization has been described in the literature to influence changes in one's psychological functioning (Clements et al., 2021). Significant findings (if any) based on HSCL or IES scores will be further explored based on the NPIPV themes identified through the qualitative analyses. Written responses that include participants labeling their victimization will be compared to participants who merely describe their victimization experiences to assess changes in psychological distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

The present study was a secondary analysis of data collected by Nowlin (2015). Data were collected through an online survey platform at a large southwestern university. The original study utilized two groups (control, $n = 86$ and experimental, $n = 105$), comprising a total sample size of 191 participants. Due to attrition rates and computer errors affecting data storage, (control group, $n = 17$ and experimental group, $n = 32$), the final sample was comprised of 142 participants (control group, $n = 69$ and experimental group, $n = 73$).

For this study only the experimental group ($n = 105$) was assessed as the grouping variable assessing the presence of NPIPV was identified using the expressive writing data. There was no way to determine the presence of NPIPV within the control group. Additionally, the original study did not find significant effects based on condition status. Therefore, this study approached the data by exploring NPIPV using the expressive writing task.

The original study outlined inclusion/exclusion criteria by the following parameters: participants must have experienced a romantic relationship for two months before the relationship dissolution and the relationship must have dissolved within six months prior to participating in the study. Additional demographic information was also collected including race/ethnicity, gender, and age. The experimental group's demographic data are outlined accordingly. Ethnicity was unequally represented. Participants were 41% White, 21% African American/Black, 27% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 4% Native American, and 3% other race. The sample consisted of 54% women and 46% men, with the average age of participants being 20.04 ($SD = 3.24$). The original study demographics did not assess for the potential of a gender diverse

sampling and only included options for gender to be defined on the binary system (i.e., male or female). Finally, the experimental condition of the sample only included three participants that identified as bisexual and one participant that identified at gay.

Sample Size Estimation

The experimental sample was divided into two groups based on NPIPV status (i.e., individuals writing about IPV and individuals who do not write about IPV). Concerning the potential sample size of the NPIPV participant group, a preliminary screening of the expressive writing data identified about a third of the participants wrote about their NPIPV victimization. Considering IPV prevalence rates among college samples, these data demonstrate similar rates falling between 30-50% of participants reporting IPV (Clements et al., 2018; Fantasia et al., 2018).

Power Analysis

This study utilized archival data. Therefore, the final sample size informed the post hoc power analysis. For Hypothesis 1, using an Exact McNemar test, a post hoc power analysis was computed. Using the odds ratio and the proportion expected to change as result of the intervention of a one-tailed design, an alpha of .05 , and 73 participants (experimental only group) demonstrated adequate power (> 80%).

For Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 using a multivariate analysis of variance, a post hoc analysis demonstrated adequate power achievement (> 80%). Using the sample size (N = 73) and a low Pillai's V of 0.1 to calculate the effect size, suggesting a small effect size would achieve adequate power (80%) considering two measurements for two groups at type one error rate of 0.05.

Procedure

Nowlin (2015) used an online survey platform to recruit participants who were also randomly assigned to one of two conditions (control or experimental). Both conditions completed initial self-report measures (e.g., demographics, relationship history) followed by a writing exercise. Participants in the experimental condition completed an expressive writing exercise related to their previous romantic relationship adhering to Pennebaker's writing paradigm (1997). In contrast, participants in the control condition wrote about their daily routine and what they did during the same day as participating in the study. Upon completing the writing task, participants completed the remaining measures, examining their current levels of psychological distress and posttraumatic symptomology.

Participants assigned to the experimental condition were requested to return within one week to complete a second expressive writing exercise. Finally, all participants returned three weeks after the initial data collection point for a follow-up session; during the final meeting, participants completed the previous self-report measures for the second time. They also reported significant life changes (e.g., reconciling with a partner, new relationships, positive or negative life events). Upon completion of the study, researchers debriefed participants, adhering to ethical review board requirements.

Study Materials

General Demographics

Participants completed a brief demographic inventory including questions assessing their age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class year.

Relationship Demographics

Participants completed a demographic list specific to their recently terminated

relationship at the initial and final sessions (Appendix A). Participants responded to the following: length of the relationship, amount of time since the breakup, gender of the ex-partner, breakup initiation (i.e., participant, ex-partner, mutual, or unclear), perceived cause, the commitment level of self and partner as rated on separate 4-point scales (i.e., *not committed*, *somewhat committed*, *strongly committed*, or *very strongly committed*), pain experienced after termination, and current relationship status (Boelen & Van Den Hout, 2010). During the final session, there was additional screening for possible reconnection with their ex-partner and any other significant positive or negative life events following the first data collection phase.

The Hopkins Symptom Checklist - 58 Items (Derogatis, 1974)

The HSCL is a 58-item self-report measure that assesses current psychological distress. The measure's primary purpose is to aid in data collection with non-clinical, outpatient populations. Five subscales compromise the HSCL (i.e., somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety), with each item rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). As reported by Nowlin (2015), the total score of this measure showed good reliability with this sample (α = .98).

The Impact of Events Scale (Horowitz et al., 1979)

The IES is a 15-item self-report measure of reactions to a traumatic life event, rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Two subscales are outlined on the IES: avoidance and intrusion. The avoidance subscale measures the degree to which an individual avoids thoughts and stimuli that remind them of the event, and the intrusion scale measures the frequency and strength of the thoughts about the event. A revised 22-item self-report measure, The Impact of Events Scale-Revised, includes an additional third subscale (hyperarousal) that was later incorporated and not part of the original IES. This study used the original 15-item measure. The IES has been used in

previous studies to examine posttraumatic symptomology in IPV populations (Grip, Almqvist, & Broberg, 2011; Scheffer Lindgren & Renck, 2008; Troisi, 2018). As reported by Nowlin, this measure showed good reliability within this sample across the two times of measurement (Time 1, α = .75-.76; Time 2, α = .84- .91).

Expressive Writing Task

Pennebaker's Expressive Writing task was the intervention used to process the writer's experience of relationship dissolution. The frequency and duration of writing sessions vary within the literature, but the study design provided a 15–20-minute session to participants for this sample. Still, participants always write about a specified topic with the intended purpose of exploring their deepest thoughts and feelings. Participants in the experimental condition received the following instructions for the expressive writing exercise:

> In the space below, please describe the relationship and the subsequent breakup of which you referred to in the previous questionnaires. I would like for you to really let go and write about your deepest thoughts and feelings about the relationship. You may write about things you did together, events that happened to you, how the relationship affected your life, and/or explore your emotions about the relationship and the breakup. No one other than the researchers involved in this project will have access to your writing. You will have 15-20 minutes to write, do not worry about spelling or grammar.

As previously defined, this is a secondary analysis of data collected by Nowlin (2015). Assessing the qualitative data collected from participants in the experimental group was warranted as they alone completed the expressive writing task.

CHAPTER 3

DATA ANALYSIS PLAN

Qualitative Analyses

As only participants in the experimental group completed the writing exercise describing their relationship dissolution, data from the control group participants were not used. Writing samples were anonymized, and each participant was assigned an identification number. The experimental writing samples were reviewed and coded following a manual designed to assess NPIPV for these secondary analyses. Other relevant information (e.g., other IPV subtypes, bidirectionality) was also coded as it emerged from the data.

Qualitative analyses followed a two-step CGT approach by applying initial and refocused coding phases to identify psychological IPV themes (Charmaz, 2006). The initial coding procedure studied words, lines, and segments of the data, examining them closely in the context of psychological IPV. This phase started as part of the initial evaluation of the clinical utility of this dataset by assessing the following: "what does the data suggest," and "from whose point of view" (Charmaz, 2006). This coding phase was outlined by the following: remaining open to the data, staying close and moving quickly through the data, keeping codes simple, comparing data with data (Charmaz, 2006). The second step was the refocused coding phase. A cross-examination characterized this phase as the initial codes that appeared most valuable in the data were examined again across the data.

The complexity and insidious nature of NPIPV made the qualitative approach necessary to capture the unique experience in participants' relationships. The initial coding phase focused on combing the expressive writing content and extensive memos of critical phrases before organizing the content into different themes. This process included examining simple terms and

keywords. A coding manual was constructed after completing the first data exploration, which included content that emerged in the initial coding process (see Appendix B). The coding manual designed to test the feasibility of the study design was foundational to the refocused coding stage—when a coding team reviewed the writing data. Considering the population and research questions, coding benefited from a clinical lens to ensure research integrity for the qualitative analysis. Two coders were identified for this study were in at least their fourth year of clinical doctoral training and had previously published research in the IPV literature. Each coder reviewed the essays independently and then collaborated on theme formation.

A total of six coding sessions took place between the coding team. These sessions lasted on average one and a half hours. During each session, coders explored initial coding themes and notes taken about the data. Coding disagreements were settled by exploring the feasibility of what had the potential to meet clinical threshold for mentioned NPIPV. Each coder was given the opportunity to challenge the other in order to positively influence scientific collegiality. When such disagreements could not be reconciled the data was compared to other similar writing entries. Inter-rater reliability was assessed to ensure agreement in documenting the presence of NPIPV. Cohen's kappa evaluated interrater reliability. The coding team were in near perfect agreement for the Time 1 writing data (κ = .82) and the Time 2 writing data (κ = .85). Evident by this study's kappa, over time coding agreement increased between the coding team.

Quantitative Analyses

Preliminary Analyses

Univariate analyses assessed outliers for variables of interest while also testing the assumption of normality by examining skew and kurtotic features. Participants' demographics such as age, gender, and ethnicity were examined to ensure there were no spuriously correlated

variables across other variables of interest outlined in this study (HSCL, IES). A correlation matrix with the HSCL and the IES assessed the relative independence of findings.

This study assessed the independent variable of NPIPV status (responses with NPIPV; responses without NPIPV). Preliminary chi-square analyses were conducted to evaluate between-group differences for categorical variables (e.g., gender). Preliminary ANOVAs were used to determine between-group differences for continuous variables (e.g., length of relationship). Relationship demographics were explored for between-group differences (e.g., length of relationship). Time one measurements of self-reported psychological symptoms (IES & HSCL) were assessed to determine if there are baseline differences between the NPIPV groups.

Hypothesis Testing

- *Hypothesis 1:* After participants complete Time 1 and Time 2, there will be an increase in participants disclosing NPIPV in their written responses. An exact McNemar Test was conducted to determine if a significantly different proportion of participants disclosed psychological IPV from Time 1 to 2 two writing responses.

- *Hypothesis 2:* NPIPV participants who completed the expressive writing paradigm will report a reduction in psychological symptoms compared to non-NPIPV participants who completed the writing task. This was tested using a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with the HSCL and IES total scores at Time 1 and Time 2 as the dependent variables and NPIPV status as the fixed factor. Demographic variables were entered as covariates following preliminary analyses if needed.

- *Hypothesis 3:* NPIPV participants who completed the expressive writing paradigm will experience a significant reduction in somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety from Time 1 to Time 2 compared to non-NPIPV participants

who completed the expressive writing paradigm. This was tested using a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with the five subscales of the HSCL (somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety) at Times 1 and 2 as the dependent variables and NPIPV status as the fixed factor. Demographic variables were entered as covariates following preliminary analyses if needed. If the omnibus test was significant, pairwise comparisons assessed where the differences occurred.

- *Hypothesis 4:* NPIPV participants who completed the expressive writing paradigm will experience a significant reduction in posttraumatic stress symptoms from Time 1 to Time 2 compared to non-NPIPV participants who completed the expressive writing paradigm. This was tested using a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), with the two subscales of the IES (avoidance and intrusion) at Time 1 and Time 2 as the dependent variables and NPIPV status as the fixed factor. Demographic variables were entered as covariates following preliminary analyses if needed. If the omnibus test was significant, pairwise comparisons were assessed.

Exploratory Analyses

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 1:* After participating in a brief writing intervention, a Chi-square test determined if NPIPV participants reported differently about returning to their partners compared to non-NPIPV participants based off the return to partner question from the relationship demographics questionnaire.

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 2:* The grouping variable included three levels (both physical and NPIPV, NPIPV only, and participants with no mention of any IPV). Participants experiencing the compounded act of physical IPV and NPIPV will report a greater reduction in self-reported psychological symptoms compared to NPIPV only participants. NPIPV only

participants will also still report a greater reduction in reported symptoms compared to non-victim participants. This exploratory analysis was tested using a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The IES and HSCL total scores at Times 1 and 2 served as the dependent variables.

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 3:* Significant findings based on HSCL or IES were further explored based on the NPIPV themes identified through the qualitative analyses. This was conducted to explore how the nuances of different NPIPV behaviors may influence reported change changes in psychological symptoms. This exploratory analysis was tested using a one-way repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with scores at Times 1 and 2 served as the dependent variables and the coding themes as the fixed factor.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Qualitative Findings

The expressive writing essays identified the NPIPV as a grouping variable for further quantitative analyses examining the relationship dissolution of NPIPV and non-NPIPV participants. Since this is a secondary analysis of Nowlin's data (2015), no other data were available to identify if IPV was present in the relationship. Exploring the experimental writing group's responses, 37 participants documented the presence of IPV, and four themes emerged from the data identifying non-physical forms of IPV between partners (see Table 1). Some writing entries had multiple NPIPV themes present. This prevalence of IPV (36%) aligns with previous research highlighting that about one-third of college samples include IPV (Clements et al., 2022).

Non-Physical Forms of IPV

Participants described experiences related to degradation, isolation, jealousy, and control. During the refocused coding phase, the theme of control was developed further to include two separate subtypes: controlling behaviors and loss of control by perpetrators. The latter two themes were coded separately as they function in different ways.

Degradation

Degradation was present in the writing responses independently as well as with other themes. It was often present in the form of insults and humiliation from the perpetrator. Participants' responses varied in the description of this theme ranging from recalling insulting words to blame and attacks on self-worth . Some respondents included minimal information simply by identifying abusive words or phrases: "tell me I was a whore, good for nothing,

stupid," or "bad things like bitch, relationship whore, messed up mentally," or "you aren't worth anything." Other participants' reports included more detailed descriptions: "say unforgivable things like hoping I'd be dead or hoping my dad had killed me when I was a kid," or "you're a stupid child…it's past your bedtime little kid," or "…that type of girl I was stupid for thinking a guy like that would ever actually want to date me."

Isolation

Participants wrote about partners wanting to influence their social interactions. *Isolation* was coded when participants expressed dissatisfaction when contact with family or friends was limited by the romantic partner: "…he started taking me away from my friends and family. I rarely ever saw my sister who is my best friend, or "…I wasn't allowed to hang out with a specific boy," or "…I had many friends that I always hung out with. He didn't like that, so I gave up all my friends for him to make him happy." In some instances, isolation was also coded when there was included reasoning by the perpetrator: "She often got mad when I would spend time with any of my other friends saying that I was missing out on valuable time I could have been spending with her," or "She tries to explain that she just wants to be with me and not be around anyone else to distract us," or "He did not understand that I wanted to spend time with my friends also, he thought I should just want to spend time with him."

Additionally, *isolation from* a partner was also an abuse tactic that emerged from the data. For example, "He began to ignore me all of the time. Like he wouldn't text me or call me back for two to four days sometimes, and I didn't understand why [I] couldn't even interact or have a relationship with anyone." This isolation tactic often was documented with other forms of abuse, such as degradation and controlling behaviors.

Jealousy

This theme was coded the most conservatively. The jealousy between romantic partners was coded with caution as it can also occur between couples in a noncontrolling way. However, since research demonstrates a perpetrator's jealousy as a predictive behavior of IPV (Kyegombe, 2016; Nemeth et al., 2012), it was relevant within this study to explore its presence in the data. Unlike themes of *isolation* or *degradation*, labeling a partner as jealous was not enough for the coding theme. For example, when a participant noted jealousy was present in the relationship but did not include additional context it would not be enough to reach coding threshold, e.g., "…not spending time together and his jealousy it was just getting too much."

When entries included contextual details that reinforced the jealousy to be more pathological in nature, these instances met coding threshold, "…things slowly got worse. X became jealous and possessive, if any other girl would want to be my friend she'd question whether or not they wanted to steal me from her. She'd get really jealous of other girls that I'd been talking to…"

Control

The last theme was outlined with two subtypes related to control over romantic partners. They also may be considered the broadest of themes. However, because they function in different ways (i.e., proactive versus reactive) it was deemed necessary to have two themes to fully capture the uniqueness of each abusive tactic. For example, the IPV literature has explored the differences between proactive and reactive aggression (Walters, 2020; Yakeley, 2022). Proactive aggression is consistent and planned while reactive aggression is usually in the form of distinct, impulsive acts. A perpetrator may utilize a mix of proactive and reactive aggressive acts based on their perceived level of control (Babcock et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2018). In this study,

baseline *controlling behaviors* were proactive and constant and *loss of control* was usually signaled by an event. Furthermore, loss of control by perpetrator was often associated with the relationship ending as a "last ditch effort" to exert control of one's partner.

- *Controlling behaviors.* Traditional accounts of *controlling behaviors* such as manipulation were outlined by participants: "…became overbearing and did not want me to make my own decisions. He felt that everything I did had to be our decision." In these responses there was usually an explanation for *controlling behaviors*. Other times participants did not include partner's justifications for *controlling behaviors*:

> …but she became a completely different person, controlling what I was doing, having to know every detail of my day, who I was talking to, what so and so said, what I was thinking. She became obsessed with my previous sexual partners and hacked into my email account and read emails from old friends.

The most prominent form of control was related to internet and cell phone activity. Participants' descriptions of electronic communications monitoring included: ". she became very needy and dependent, I would have to text message her all day long, and we would have fights about it," and "…invade my privacy and go through my phone and question me every time I left to go somewhere with my friends."

- *Loss of control.* This theme captures explicitly when perpetrators attempt to reassert control over their partner after a perceived loss of it (Senkans et al., 2020). This theme was usually more impulsive or reactive. These behaviors occurred and were coded when the non-perpetrating partner was attempting to change the current relationship dynamic. It was most often related to attempts of relationship dissolution initiated by the non-perpetrating partner. In response, *loss of control* occurred when the perpetrating partner attempted to salvage the relationship when the non-perpetrating partner tried to leave: "…first of all she wouldn't let me

close my door to leave. second of all she was lying in her front yard screaming and crying…she got pissed off for some reason and slammed my door".

Additionally, one participant wrote about NPIPV they experienced upon terminating the romantic relationship with a perpetrating partner, "I broke it off and he smashed my computer and broke into our apartment. I had to move." However, this theme can also be pervasive, and involve attempts from the perpetrating partner to regain control long after the termination of the relationship: "…and tried to control me. He even went as far as adding my new partner on social network sites and messaged them constantly about how they need to take care of me and watch out for my temper."

Acknowledgment of NPIPV

Acknowledgment of NPIPV was also coded under two themes, self-disclosure of NPIPV and disclosure by proxy. The self-disclosure theme was designed to capture writing responses that explicitly stated, "I was abused." In contrast, disclosure by proxy identified instances where responses included social support systems identifying abuse in the relationship, "my friends/family said it was abusive."

Self-Disclosure

The theme was designed to capture writing responses acknowledging the abuse. For example, "I underwent much psychological abuse" was coded for *self-disclosure* since the writer directly labeled it. During the refocused coding process, respondents that said explicitly in their responses that their relationship was abusive were coded as *self-disclosure.* These disclosures often occurred in conjunction with one of the previous six themes of NPIPV. This theme was not a common occurrence in the coding process. There were only five respondents that wrote about the NPIPV in this direct way.

Disclosure by Proxy

This theme was similar to self-disclosure, as the NPIPV was still labeled. However, the labeling occurred through a third party and was only reported by the writer. They do not actually call it abuse themselves, but someone in their social support network labeled the relationship in that way, and they are simply reporting this in their writing. Interestingly, the *disclosure by proxy* was often related to leaving or returning to the relationship: "They told me that I shouldn't take him back because it'll be just another cycle of abuse." Though sometimes it was embedded along with the four themes of NPIPV: "…all I could think of was the other people in my life and what they would say if they knew we were back together." In these instances, it was strengthened by additional evidence in the writing samples and without such support it would not have qualified for coding disclosure by proxy on its own.

Other Themes

Finally, subtypes of IPV (i.e., physical or sexual), bi-directionality, and the influence of gender on describing victimization experiences were also coded.

Multiple Types of IPV Present

The literature clearly indicates that NPIPV occurs in conjunction with physical forms of IPV (Cengic, 2020). In fact, NPIPV is a predictor of physical and sexual IPV (Cadely et al., 2020). Therefore, it was expected that some respondents would mention physical or sexual IPV. Accordingly, the theme of *multiple types of IPV present* was created to account for responses that included violence outside the scope of the four themes of NPIPV. Some of these accounts were physical acts of violence such as: "…Things like this continued to happen and I had to think of new ways to hide my bruises and cuts from friends because they were asking questions," or "…slammed my head on a wall and bit my arm so badly it looked like I had been shot with a

paintball gun at extremely close range." There were also accounts that were sexually violent, "…he took advantage of me when I was drunk. We were both at a party, he pulled me into a back room and started having sex with me. I told him to stop, and he didn't…it's one of the most traumatic things I've ever gone through."

Bi-Directionality

IPV across subtypes can be perpetrated by both partners in relationships where NPIPV is present (Dokkedahl & Elklit, 2019). It was also outlined within these writing samples, which warranted coding for the bi-directionality of NPIPV. This was not evident with physical or sexual IPV. It only emerged in the form of NPIPV. For example, "In response to her snooping I thought I would show her how it felt a bit, and one day while she was out I logged in to her email just as she had done to me." This respondent writes about controlling behaviors that both he and his romantic partner engaged in during their relationship. Participants also outlined the theme of degradation as a mutually occurring behavior: "We argued our lungs out…called each other harsh words and completely cruel things." Sometimes the bidirectional NPIPV would be different subtypes of IPV: "…pushed me to my limits one day he was talking to me very disrespectful*[sic]*, calling me names when we were headed out of town for the weekend, so I got pissed and kicked him out *[sic]*the car with his stuff thrown all over the street."

Influence of Gender on NPIPV

The most unexpected theme that emerged from the data was related to the influence of gender. However, it is clear that gender has impacted IPV research consistently across decades of study. In the initial coding phase, NPIPV perspectives tended to be structured differently when men were writing about victimization. Men writing about their partner's perpetration often minimized the experience of NPIPV. This was particularly striking to the coding team when two

different entries (one written by a man and another a woman) both described a similar NPIPV victimization experience of being locked out of their residence in cold temperatures.

- *A man was describing NPIPV.* "I moved out of the apartment after I went out with some friends to the club, and X got upset with me and locked me out of the apartment in the cold- that I was helping pay for. I said that this was the final draw *[sic]*…."
- *A woman was describing NPIPV.* "Even after the verbal abuse, the nights he locked me outside in 25-degree weather, the public humiliation he exposed me to. Not to mention the stress, anxiety, & pain he caused me on a day-to-day basis. I became a walking zombie."

Quantitative Findings

Preliminary Analyses

The qualitative findings identified the independent variable of NPIPV status (responses with NPIPV; responses without NPIPV). For example, any mention of either the four themes or disclosure of NPIPV qualified a participant to be part of the NPIPV status group. Overall, 36% of participants wrote about NPIPV victimization experiences before their relationship dissolution. Preliminary chi-square analyses were conducted to evaluate between-group differences for categorical variables: gender and race/ethnicity. Chi-square analysis showed a significant difference in gender across NPIPV status (see Table 2; $p = .044$) with more women writing about NPIPV than men. Additional gender analysis demonstrated women were with their romantic partners significantly longer than men ($M = 23.05$, $SE = 2.01$ and $M = 16.13$, $SE = 2.19$, $p < .022$; respectively). Therefore, gender was covaried in subsequent hypothesis testing. Finally, a bivariate correlational matrix was run to explore gender comparisons based on the defined NPIPV themes developed from the qualitative analyses (all ps > .05; rs = -.280 to .222).

No significant between-group differences were based on race/ethnicity across NPIPV

status (p = .424). Initial data on race/ethnicity had seven levels of coding (coded 1 = White, 2 = African American/Black, 3 = Hispanic/Latin, 4 = Asian, 5 = Hawaiian/Pacific Island, 6 = Native American, 7 = other race) . Due to small *n* in cells 4, 5, 6, and 7, they were combined to assess between-group differences. Additionally, preliminary Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to determine between-group differences for continuous variables: length of relationship, age, and education length. ANOVAs showed no significant differences by NPIPV status (all *ps* > .05). Due to small *n* , sexuality could not between assessed for between-group differences.

The average relationship length of the overall expressive writing group prior to dissolution was 19.88 months (*SD* = 15.48) with a range of 3.00-73.00 months. Additionally, participants reported length of time since dissolution of the relationship with an average of 20.76 weeks (*SD* = 20.35) with a with a range of 1.00 to 122.00 weeks. Relationship demographics were explored further based on NPIPV status. NPIPV participants had an average relationship length prior to dissolution of 22.30 months (*SD* = 15.36) with a range of 5.00-73.00 months. NPIPV participants also had an average time since dissolution of the relationship of 17.84 weeks (*SD* =11.17). Additionally, 76% of NPIPV participants, initiated relationship dissolution. Participants that did not mention NPIPV victimization experiences had an average relationship length of 18.56 months (*SD* = 15.50) with a range of 3.00-60.00 months. These participants also had an average time since dissolution of the relationship of 22.35 weeks (*SD* =23.84). Finally, participants with no mention of NPIPV initiated relationship dissolution at a similar rate (73%) as the NPIPV participant group. An ANOVA demonstrated there were no significant between-group differences based on relationship length (p = .239) or length of time since the dissolution (.279). Additional analyses of relationship demographic data were explored based on the grouping variable (NPIPV status). The following were explored for between-group differences:

recovery from relationship dissolution, the role of infidelity in dissolution of relationship, pain experienced, and if they or their romantic partner resisted break-up. There were no significant differences between NPIPV participants and participants with no mention of NPIPV (all *p*s > .05). Complete relationship demographic data are outlined in Table 3.

Independent samples t-tests and correlational analyses assessed participants' demographic variables with the HSCL and IES. Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant gender differences on the HSCL ($p = .066$) or IES ($p = .110$). Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant race/ethnicity differences on the HSCL ($p = .067$) or IES ($p = .168$). A bivariate correlational matrix was conducted to assess participants' demographic variables with the HSCL and IES to identify any spurious correlations (all *ps* > .05; *r*s = -.198 - -.074) and the relative independence of findings. The HSCL and IES correlation matrix showed significant findings (see Table 4).

A preliminary analysis was conducted to examine pre-expressive writing HSCL and IES scores based on the grouping variable (NPIPV status). Time one measurement of the HSCL was not significant based on NPIPV status, Wilks' Lambda, $F(5, 98) = .468$, $p = .799$, and Time 1 measurement of the IES was not significant based on NPIPV status, Wilks' Lambda, $F(2, 101) = 1.68$, $p = .191$.

Hypothesis Testing

- *Hypothesis 1:* A McNemar test was conducted to determine if a greater proportion of participants mentioned NPIPV victimization in their writing responses in Time 1 compared to Time 2. An exact McNemar's test determined that there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of mentions of victimization between Time 1 and Time 2 writing sessions, *p* =

.004, Φ = .837 (see Table 5). Hypothesis one was supported from the Time 1 and Time 2 writing sessions; there was an increase in the disclosure of NPIPV.

- *Hypothesis 2:* A one-way repeated measures MANCOVA was conducted to assess differences between NPIPV group participants and non-NPIPV participants across time on the HSCL and IES. The fixed factor was NPIPV status, and the dependent variables were Time 1 and Time 2 measurements of HSCL and IES total scores with gender entered as a covariate. The multivariate analysis between subjects was not significant, Wilks' Lambda, $F(2, 69) = .868$, $p = .424$ nor were there significant within subjects' effects based on time, Wilks' Lambda, $F(2, 69) = 1.603$, $p = .209$.

- *Hypothesis 3:* A one-way repeated measures MANCOVA was conducted to assess differences between NPIPV participants and non-NPIPV participants reported on the HSCL subscales (somatization, obsessive-compulsivity, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and anxiety) across time. The fixed factor was NPIPV status, and the dependent variables were the Time 1 and Time 2 HSCL subscales with gender was entered as a covariate. The multivariate analysis between subjects (NPIPV status) was not significant, Wilks' Lambda, $F(5, 66) = .512$, $p = .766$, and there was no within subjects' effects (time), Wilks' Lambda, $F(5, 66) = .843$, $p = .524$. Participants did not differ on the HSCL scores after completing the writing intervention based on NPIPV being present in the relationship.

- *Hypothesis 4:* A one-way repeated measures MANCOVA was conducted to assess differences between NPIPV participants and non-NPIPV participants in their writing samples on the IES subscales (avoidance and intrusion) across time. The fixed factor was NPIPV status, and the dependent variables were Time 1 and Time 2 IES subscale scores with gender entered as a covariate. The multivariate analysis between subjects was not significant, Wilks' Lambda, $F(2,$

69) = .558, p = .575. There were no differences in IES subscale scores after completing the writing intervention based on NPIPV being present in the relationship. However, the within-subjects analysis had a significant main effect across time, Wilks' Lambda, $F(2, 69) = 3.279$, p = .044. Univariate results indicated there was a significant change over time for the avoidance subscale (p = .032). Pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction demonstrated a significant reduction in self-reported avoidance symptoms from Time 1 to Time 2 regardless of NPIPV status (M = 21.43, SE = .60 and M = 18.50, SE = .70, $p < .001$; respectively).

Exploratory Analyses

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 1:* Pearsons' chi-square test was conducted to determine if there would be a difference based on the grouping variable (NPIPV status) for participants returning to their romantic partner (as reported on the relationship demographics questionnaire) after completing the expressive writing task. Chi-Square analysis showed no differences in reuniting with one's romantic partner based on NPIPV status, $\chi^2(2, N = 73) = 1.982$, p = .159. Although the chi-square was not significant, it is important to note that only 8% of the overall sample reunited with the romantic partners; four participants were from the NPIPV group, and two participants from the non-NPIPV group.

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 2:* After completing qualitative analyses, only four participants included other forms of IPV (physical or sexual) outside of NPIPV. Therefore, there was not enough power to conduct further exploratory analyses assessing potential differences between different types of IPV. The sample does not have enough power to detect any changes on the IES or HSCL based on different types of IPV.

- *Exploratory Hypothesis 3:* Significant findings on the IES avoidance subscale were further explored based on the coding theme, *self-disclosure*, identified through the qualitative

analyses. Only eight participants explicitly labeled their victimization experiences. Therefore, there was not enough power to conduct further exploratory analyses assessing potential differences between NPIPV participants who acknowledged victimization and NPIPV who merely described NPIPV victimization. The sample does not have enough power to detect any changes on the IES avoidance subscale based on NPIPV themes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

NPIPV victim experiences are often dismissed (Masci & Sanderson, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the presence of NPIPV in romantic relationships through the qualitative analysis of an expressive writing intervention. This was particularly important as NPIPV is the foundational element of all IPV and highlighting this IPV subtype allowed exploration of its clinical and empirical importance, in contrast to the current literature that has investigated this construct as a secondary experience or precursor to other IPV subtypes. It was imperative to investigate NPIPV because previous research has also suggested that psychological aggression can be just as or more harmful than physical IPV (Band-Winterstein & Avieli, 2021; Yalch & Rickman, 2021). The mixed-methods design explored NPIPV activity that was spontaneously mentioned in post-breakup expressive writing essays. That is, participants in this study were never asked about IPV experiences.

Secondly, quantitative analyses tested the effects of the brief expressive writing intervention. Findings demonstrated am overall reduction in trauma-related avoidance symptoms despite NPIPV status. The findings of this study highlighted the prominence of NPIPV in romantic relationship breakups and provided evidence that individuals with NPIPV victimization, as well as individuals with no experience of NPIPV can benefit from a brief expressive writing intervention following relationship dissolution.

Qualitative Findings

This study grouped NPIPV behaviors into four major themes (degradation, isolation, control, jealousy), which helped to identify more participants for the grouping variable for subsequent quantitative analyses. Previous research has found that control and jealousy in

romantic relationships predicts IPV perpetration (Keliholtz et al., 2023), which occurred within the context of this study. Jealousy may be a catalyst for more disruptive and harmful NPIPV experiences.

These findings also condensed NPIPV behaviors identified in previous research. For example, in previous qualitative studies assessing NPIPV, researchers have included numerous codes from eight to as many as thirty NPIPV behaviors (Faust, 2021; Godfrey et al., 2021). By creating a more succinct coding manual, a streamlined coding process encouraged more objectivity as evidenced by near perfect agreement between coders (all $\kappa > .80$). Additionally, quantitative analyses (i.e., Hypothesis 1) highlighted that the more participants wrote about their relationship, as evidenced by multiple writing sessions, the more they mentioned and described NPIPV acts that had occurred.

Only the coding theme of NP*IPV self-disclosure* captured participants acknowledging victimization. It is unclear what impact labeling personal experiences as IPV has on psychological functioning. Clements and colleagues (2021) demonstrated an initial increase in depressive symptoms in women upon learning about IPV victimization status. However, some researchers suspect that long-term benefits outweigh short-term adverse effects on psychological functioning (Hammond & Calhoun, 2007). For example, there is a strong correlation between acknowledgment and help-seeking behaviors (Peatee, 2022). Disclosure of NPIPV offers a unique opportunity that can inspire change and promote healthier relationships in the future. However, studies have shown that one can describe abusive acts but avoid labeling them as abusive behavior (Johnson, 2023). This ambiguity about labeling was present within the coding structure of these data. Some participants described acts and labeled them as abuse, while others would broadly include the four themes (degradation, isolation, control, jealousy) without labeling

the behaviors as abusive. Exploring these motivations was impossible, but it is interesting, nonetheless. Future research could explore if there is a threshold level of NPIPV victimization that has to be present in order for someone to acknowledge their experience as abusive. For example, it may have been in this study that length of relationship, intensity, and frequency influenced the *disclosure of NPIPV.* Comparing NPIPV participants based on *disclosure of NPIPV* the average length of relationship was four months longer for participants that met for this theme, but the total NPIPV behaviors experienced was less than those who did not explicitly disclose.

Another explanation for this occurrence could be that labeling it as abuse outright was almost a sort of shorthand practice to summarize their experience. If this was the case, the same threshold might have been met previously by those participants, so they did not have a need to include as many descriptors of NPIPV experiences. Especially if acknowledgment increases help-seeking behaviors, these individuals may have accessed care. Labeling NPIPV acts as abusive may have empowered participants to leave these relationships and reduce the likeliness of re-engaging in IPV in future relationships (Schaefer et al., 2021). However, these latter assumptions can only be proposed as there is no way to identify such changes in these data.

On the other hand, disclosure of NPIPV may have been a form of practiced avoidance. Since avoidance symptoms were significantly reduced on the IES across time, it seemed logical to examine possible correlates between the *self-disclosure* coding theme and IES avoidance subscale as a possible explanation of the underlying motivations of acknowledging NPIPV victimization. Exploratory analyses on this distinction did not yield any significant findings. This may be because of small cell size as only eight participants met criteria for either the *disclosure by proxy* or the *self-disclosure* coding themes. Nonetheless, research has outlined that people

who have experienced victimization have many negative cognitions, including self-blame, shame, guilt, and embarrassment about the IPV experiences (Crowe & Murray, 2021; Lim et al., 2015) and adverse reactions from their social support networks can reinforce these beliefs (Ullman, 2023). Participants may have been motivated not to re-experience such negative feelings by not detailing their abuse further than labeling it. The results of this study can only generate new hypotheses about the underlying mechanisms that inspired such behaviors.

Quantitative Findings

The first hypothesis evaluated that more participants would mention scorable NPIPV experiences at Time 2 than they did at Time 1 writing sessions. The writing sessions increased the number of participants describing NPIPV behaviors. Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported. Writing about their previous relationship provided the opportunity to identify NPIPV experiences. The expressive writing literature has expanded on this due to the benefits individuals experience when cognitive processing mechanisms (e.g., installation of hope, goal-directed thought content) are incorporated as part of the intervention model (Barr, 2017; Frattaroli, 2006).

Increasing disclosure increases the potential for help-seeking behaviors (Parvin et al. 2016). Exploring relationship dissolution may help create positive change for individuals by allowing them to recognize what they do not want in future romantic relationships. For example, reflecting on NPIPV experiences allows one to identify healthy relationship factors for future prospective romantic partners (Cravens et al., 2015) via the experience of writing about their relationship to create awareness and understanding of relationship dissolution. For example, one participant's writing in the Time 1 entry, showed uncertainty about NPIPV victimization

compared to their Time 2 entry which detailed it directly meeting threshold for the 'self-disclosure' coding theme.

Hypotheses two, three, and four were conducted to explore the effectiveness of the brief writing intervention in reducing self-reported psychological symptoms across the grouping variable. Unfortunately, there were no significant changes in self-reported symptoms for HSCL or IES total scores for participants with or without NPIPV present in their relationship essays. Therefore, the second hypothesis was not supported. It may be that participants, before engaging in this intervention, resolved or processed some potentially harmful psychological symptoms directly after relationship dissolution.

Even though no significant changes were noted on the total scores, the HSCL and IES subscales were also explored. The third hypothesis assessed changes on the HSCL subscales. There were no significant effects for between or within subjects. Hypothesis three was not supported. This was particularly surprising given that extensive research documents that IPV victimization impacts individuals' psychological functioning (Beydoun et al., 2017; Cody & Beck, 2014; Lagdon et al., 2014). For example, the HSCL depression and anxiety subscales at the very least were expected to demonstrate changes since IPV victimization has consistently been linked to anxiety and mood-related psychiatric disorders (Ahmadabadi et al., 2020; Okuda et al., 2015).

The fourth hypothesis assessed changes on the IES subscales. Participants demonstrated a significant reduction in self-reported avoidance symptoms regardless of NPIPV status. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported as the writing intervention decreased this symptom across Time 1 and Time 2. This finding is particularly important as it explores psychological symptoms specific to PTSD and previous research has outlined that individuals

experiencing IPV victimization can meet the criteria of PTSD (Gobin et al., 2015; Nixon et al., 2004). This study demonstrated clinical utility in reducing avoidance from a brief intervention. Given this finding, it is important to recognize the extensive research that supports how accounting one's lived experience aids in trauma processing, making narrative therapy an important facet of trauma-focused treatment practices (Llewellyn-Beardsley et al., 2019; Maercker et al., 2022).

Cognitive processing therapy (Resick et al., 2008), written exposure therapy (WET; Sloan & Marx, 2019), and prolonged exposure (Peterson et al., 2019) all incorporate storytelling. Narrative accounts provide helpful information during these interventions. Trauma memories are often avoided by the individual which reinforces non-recovery. Therefore, this study had the potential to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in the recovery process by retelling and reflecting over their experience. This is particularly relevant as a meta-analysis of 146 studies showed that disclosing one's most profound, deepest thoughts and feelings improves psychological well-being (Frattaroli, 2006). Chung & Pennebaker (2008) also explored various session numbers to explore the efficacy of expressive writing under different circumstances. Their study noted that in all experimental condition participants benefited from writing compared to controls despite the number of sessions.

There may have only been partial symptom effects (reducing avoidance symptoms) because the length of the intervention was too short and did not include therapeutic processes encompassed by therapist support. Considering previously noted evidence-based interventions, WET was also designed after Pennebaker's (1997) expressive writing model and has demonstrated efficacy in reducing or even remitting trauma-related symptoms (LoSavio et al., 2023; Sloan & Marx, 2019). Three key differences exist between WET and this study's standard

expressive writing intervention. First, WET includes five one-hour sessions with a 30-minute writing exercise (Sloan & Marx, 2019). In contrast, this study was two 20-minute writing sessions. Secondly, the later sessions of WET (3-5) adjust the writing prompt to include the following: how the experience has changed their life, a focus on meaning-making, long-term outcomes of trauma, and how they want their life to look in the future (Sloan & Marx, 2019). Finally, WET includes a provider giving feedback on writing entries and creating a space that encourages the exploration of deepest thoughts and feelings.

Application of Findings

This study utilized a college sample for its participant pool. College samples assessing NPIPV offer a useful perspective as the literature highlights that the age for a first encounter of an IPV relationship is before twenty-five (CDC, 2012). IPV usually emerges in early adulthood (ages 17-20), encompassing the traditional college age range (Johnson et al., 2015). Hanson-Frieze and colleagues (2020) suggested that expanding the clinical lens of IPV beyond community and shelter samples is particularly important within the context of NPIPV. This suggestion is particularly evident as college students are at risk for re-victimization (Schramm et al., 2023).

College students are also more likely to approve of IPV in future relationships or their peer's relationships if they have previously experienced victimization (Spencer et al., 2019). Even though this study did not assess perceptions of IPV, it is interesting to consider if such approval influenced the participants in this study to prolong the romantic relationship once NPIPV behavior emerged. Such acts may become normalized, making them more accepted than physical acts. Participants in this study may have longstanding beliefs about relationship

dynamics that would be considered NPIPV from a clinical lens but are neutralized or accepted from a non-clinical lens.

Gender impacted this study. It influenced how individuals wrote about their relationships which then later influenced the grouping variable for quantitative analyses. More women wrote about NPIPV than men; therefore, it was covaried during hypothesis testing. The impact of gender may have been unavoidable as there were more women than men in the study and women were in their relationships six months longer than men. Research has identified that NPIPV victimization is more readily attributed to women's experiences even when men have similar accounts (DeHart et al., 2010). NPIPV behaviors may be commonplace across multiple relationships but reinforcing gender schemas may deem NPIPV victimization for men as appropriate rather than unsafe (Copp et al., 2016). This is particularly concerning as both men and women are impacted negatively by NPIPV victimization (Dim, 2021; Vinayak et al., 2015), yet men's experiences are not often recognized. Gender continues to complicate this field as researchers must acknowledge both the existence of men's victimization experiences and the greater severity of women's victimization.

Limitations

As this was a secondary analysis, sampling for the study was fixed, with the original recruitment focused on relationship dissolution, which is not specific to NPIPV relationships. Therefore, this study relied on spontaneous mention of instances of NPIPV that occurred for the writer. This may have been the study's biggest limitation as there very well could have been participants who experienced NPIPV victimization but dismissed it before engaging in the writing intervention. However, it must be noted that NPIPV was still present in 36% of

participants' writing entries. This prevalence demonstrated a potential that warranted the exploration of NPIPV and expressive writing as an effective intervention.

Even though NPIPV was evident within the writing samples, it was often described broadly, making it difficult to explore how the behaviors emerged and how often they occurred. There is some uncertainty about the severity and frequency in which this sample's NPIPV was perpetrated. Events coded during qualitative analyses could not account for how frequent or severe such acts were within the context of the relationship (Hancock, 2017; James & MacKinnon, 2010). Moreover, participants may have engaged in self-blame by interpreting their partner's perpetration as their responsibility (Sylaska & Edwards, 2013).

Considering the average length of relationship within the sample, NPIPV couples may have experienced several NPIPV behaviors consistently before relationship dissolution. The average length of a relationship was more than a year. This is important to note as positive correlates suggest that repeated and consistent use of NPIPV prolongs the relationship (Heron et al., 2022). Perpetrators often employ non-physical acts to control their romantic partner (McLeod et al., 2020); so much so that sometimes NPIPV victimization may be tolerated as an accepted, appropriate behavior (Lelaurain et al., 2021). For example, Popescu and colleagues (2009) demonstrated that social norms can strengthen beliefs that IPV is a normal aspect of a romantic relationship. These social norms contrast with this study's data since participants writing about their NPIPV victimization experiences have successfully uncoupled from their abusive partner. Participants in this study may have sought relationship dissolution because of the presence of NPIPV perpetration from their partners; however, there were no between-group differences on who initiated dissolution from romantic partners. Furthermore, instructions of the expressive writing intervention encouraged participants to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings in

an attempt to process and gain further insight on their relationship post-break up. Therefore, these data may not be generalizable to individuals still attached to their abusive romantic partners.

Additional demographic variables such as race/ethnicity may have limited the scope of this research. This study disproportionally represented a majority of white participants. One study noted that white women could more readily identify non-physical acts of IPV than white men and minority populations (Marganski et al., 2021), which may account for the prevalence of NPIPV in this sample. These data are limited in generalizability for more diverse populations assessing college IPV. Future research should consider the impact of intersectionality when assessing NPIPV. However, the sample was representative of the sampled southwest university's student population, and preliminary analysis of race/ethnicity across the grouping variable was not significant. In other words, race/ethnicity did not confound these results.

Research has demonstrated that NPIPV can be the strongest risk factor for mental health difficulties when compared to other forms of IPV subtypes (Dokkedahl et al., 2021) with PTSD, a disorder of nonrecovery, a prominent diagnosis (McLaughlin et al., 2013). In other words, the natural recovery process that most individuals undergo after a traumatic experience is absent for some. Individuals who would fall under this clinical distinction would benefit from a clinical intervention to address PTSD symptoms (Pepper, 2022). Participants' average scores on the IES avoidance from Time 1 to Time 2 reduced from the moderate to mild clinical range. Frattaroli's meta-analysis highlighted that expressive writing reduced PTSD symptoms especially when interventions included three or more sessions (2006).

Future Directions

One essential goal for future studies would be to reduce the stigma of NPIPV

victimization. Often after relationship dissolution, NPIPV can be minimized or dismissed. This could be due to reactions from their social support network reinforcing victim-blaming statements (DeKeseredy et al., 2019; Overstreet et al., 2019). This study supports what is already present in the literature, that NPIPV is just as important as other forms of IPV when considering its impacts. This was evident by the prevalence of NPIPV mentioned in the writing entries. Unlike other subtypes, NPIPV is pervasive and occurs even when individuals do not consider it to be abuse. This is an important factor considering that psychological IPV is often a predictor for IPV reengagement in future relationships (Marganski et al., 2021; Stein et al., 2019).

Over their lifetime, 35-56% of women will experience a pattern of NPIPV relationships (Stein et al., 2022). In the context of this study, participants may have been describing just one of what could have been a series of unhealthy, dangerous romantic relationships. Therefore, targeting NPIPV may be helpful in reducing future more severe forms of IPV. First, providing follow-up resources that promote and define healthy relationships could serve as an early prevention strategy to target an ongoing pattern of NPIPV; secondly, exploring relationship dyads of IPV to assess bi-directionality. For a long time IPV literature understood abuse to be linear with the romantic relational dyads to have one identified perpetrator. However, if future studies address that one can experience victimization and also perpetrate, it may help to address gender schemas that reinforce the minimization of NPIPV. Future research should focus on breaking the cycle of IPV relationship patterns rather than measuring one isolated partnership (Spencer et al., 2019).

Finally, NPIPV is more complex than other trauma experiences for a number of reasons including that it is sustained, consistent, and often intertwined with consensual or mutual feelings of love. There has been extensive discussion in the field regarding the emergence of the new

diagnosis of Complex PTSD (Brewin, 2020; Maercker, 2021; Reed et al., 2022) due to the uniqueness of its presentation and etiology compared to a formal PTSD diagnosis. Developmental trauma experiences and IPV relationships may better fit this clinical conceptualization as they highlight the importance of interpersonal influence (Karatzias & Levendosky, 2019).

Future research may benefit from conceptualizing IPV victimization through the lens of Complex PTSD. This is particularly relevant as intergenerational transmission (Ehrensaft & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2022) has been extensively researched by exploring how developmental trauma affects childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Rather than an anchored criterion A trauma experience (used to diagnose PTSD), Complex PTSD may be harder to address because it is not an isolated act but rather a 'death by a thousand cuts.' McLeod's theoretical model of IPV incorporates this distinction by highlighting that a perpetrator utilizes the baseline controlling behaviors to break down any individual agency and autonomy their romantic partner may have had before the intimate relationship (2021).

Lastly, IPV relationships often incorporate contradictory variables of love and consent (Pocock et al., 2019). For example, research exploring sexual violence has highlighted that women in IPV relationships label their sexual victimization differently when compared to rape victims (Basile, 2002). Future research on bi-directional IPV also complicates things as partners may see power and control equally if both perpetrate IPV towards one another. Individual differences may moderate IPV's influence on psychological functioning because of these intricacies.

Table 1

*Frequencies of NPIPV Themes, Total NPIPV Experiences, & Other Themes (*N = *37)*

		NPIPV Participants	
		n	**%**
NPIPV Themes	Degradation	14	37.8
	Isolation	10	27.0
	Jealousy	9	24.3
	Control	25	67.6
Total NPIPV Experiences	At least 1 NPIPV present	22	59.2
	2 acts of NPIPV present	10	27.0
	3 acts of NPIPV present	4	10.8
	All 4 NPIPV acts present	1	2.7
Other Themes	Self-disclosure of NPIPV	4	10.8
	Disclosure by proxy of NPIPV	7	18.9
	Multiple Types of IPV present	3	2.9
	Bi-directional IPV	3	2.9

Table 2

Crosstabulation of Gender across Victim Status

IPV in Expressive Writing	**Female**		**Male**		**Total**	
	n	**%**	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**
Present	25	44	12	25	37	36
Absent	32	56	36	75	68	64
Total	57		48		105	

Note: Pearson Chi-square was significant at the 0.044 (two-tailed) and Φ = .196

Table 3

Relationship Demographics Data

Relationship Demographics	**Overall Sample *M (SD)***	**NPIPV *M (SD)***	**Non-NPIPV *M (SD)***	***t*-Test Values *t*(103)**	**Cohen's *d***
Relationship Length (months)	19.88 (15.48)	22.30 (15.36)	18.56 (15.50)	1.19, *p* =.239	.24
Time Since Relationship Dissolution (weeks)	20.76 (20.35)	17.84 (11.17)	22.35 (23.84)	-1.09, *p* =.279	-.22

(table continues)

Relationship Demographics	Overall Sample *M (SD)*	NPIPV *M (SD)*	Non-NPIPV *M (SD)*	*t*-Test Values *t*(103)	Cohen's *d*
Recovered from Relationship Dissolution	-	2.68 (.92)	2.78 (.83)	-.574, p = .568	-.12
Infidelity played a role in Relationship	-	1.54 (.51)	1.56 (.50)	-.18, p = .430	.50
Painful Relationship Dissolution	-	2.89 (.74)	2.99 (.74)	-.62, p = .539	-.13
Resistance to Break-up	-	2.24 (.80)	2.44 (1.11)	-1.05, p =.295	-.20
% of Participants who initiated Dissolution	-	76	73	-.721, p = .473	-.15

Table 4

Correlations among Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL) & Impact of Events (IES) Subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
HSCL Somatization	-								
HSCL Obsessive-Compulsive	.818*	-							
HSCL Interpersonal Sensitivity	.740*	.790*	-						
HSCL Depression	.834*	.765*	.811*	-					
HSCL Anxiety	.858*	.702*	.705*	.824*	-				
HSCL Total	.941*	.897*	.871*	.923*	.890*	-			
IES Intrusion	.459*	.418*	.484*	.525*	.477*	.522*	-		
IES Avoidance	.372*	.471*	.516*	.490*	.408*	.500*	.844*	-	
IES Total	.433*	.463*	.521*	.529*	.461*	.532*	.960*	.961*	-

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 5

*Changes in NPIPV Status in Expressive Writing Entries (EW) from Time 1 to Time 2 (*N *= 105)*

		Time 2 EW			
		NPIPV		No IPV	
		n	%	*n*	%
Time 1 EW	NPIPV	29	78	0	0
	No IPV	8	22	68	100
	Total	37	36	68	64

Note: The Exact McNemar test was significant, p = .004 (two-tailed) and Φ = .837

APPENDIX A

RELATIONSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS

Relationship Demographics – Time 1

What was the gender of your ex? Please choose only one of the following:

- Female
- Male

How long was the relationship for which you had your most recent serious breakup? Please use your most serious, most recent breakup. If you do not know the exact time, please estimate in years and months. If you were together less than a year, place a "0" in the years box Please write your answer(s) here:

- Years
- Months

How long ago did this breakup occur? If you do not know the exact amount of time that has passed since the breakup, please estimate. The time period should not be greater than 6 months. If a full month has not passed, place "0" in the month box and the appropriate number of weeks. Please write your answer(s) here:

- Months
- Weeks

Do you believe infidelity played a part in your breakup? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

Who do you believe initiated this breakup? Please choose only one of the following:

- I did
- I somewhat did
- We both did
- My partner somewhat did
- My partner did

Briefly, why do you believe you broke up? Please write your answer here:

Did either you or your ex resist the breakup? Please choose only one of the following:

- Me
- My Ex
- Both
- Neither

Please say a few words about how you would define this relationship. Please be brief, no more than five words

How committed were you to your former relationship? Please choose only one of the following:

- Not Very Committed
- Somewhat Committed

- Strongly Committed
- Very Strongly Committed

How committed do you believe your ex was to your former relationship? Please choose only one of the following:

- Not Committed
- Somewhat Committed
- Strongly Committed
- Very Strongly Committed

All things considered, how painful was this breakup for you? Please choose only one of the following:

- Not at all painful
- Somewhat painful
- Very painful
- Extremely painful

All things considered, how much do you feel you've recovered after the breakup? Please choose only one of the following:

- Not at all recovered
- Somewhat recovered
- Very recovered
- Completely recovered

Are you currently in a new relationship? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Maybe- Please explain.Make a comment on your choice here:

How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement, "I had little trouble finding another romantic partner who could replace my ex". Please choose only one of the following:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Have you experienced a major stressor in the past three months other than your breakup? If so, please briefly describe it. Examples: death of loved one, life transition, financial stress for college or someone else, military duty, physical safety/violence. Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Make a comment on your choice here:

Have you experienced a minor stressor in the past week? If so, please briefly describe it. Example: long commute, poor test grade, job stress, fight with friend. Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Make a comment on your choice here:

Relationship Demographics – Followup (Time 2)

Have you romantically reunited with your former partner in the past three weeks? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- (If not reunited, skip to question 6)

Are you still together at this time? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

How long have you been reunited? Please write your answer(s) here:

- weeks
- days

If you are no longer reunited, please state for how long you *were* reunited before separating again. If you do not know the exact amount of time that has passed since you reunited, please estimate. The time period should not be greater than 3 weeks. If a full week has not passed, place "0" in the week box and then appropriate number of days.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not Very Committed	Somewhat Committed	Strongly Committed	Very Strongly Committed
How committed are you to your partner at this time?	○	○	○	○
How committed is your partner to you?	○	○	○	○

Have you begun a new relationship in the past three weeks? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

How long have you been together? Please write your answer(s) here:

- weeks
- days

If you do not know the exact amount of time that has passed since you began a new relationship, please estimate. The time period should not be greater than 3 weeks. If a full week has not passed, place "0" in the week box and then the appropriate number of days.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not Very Committed	Somewhat Committed	Strongly Committed	Very Strongly Committed
How committed are you to your new partner?	○	○	○	○
How committed is your new partner to you?	○	○	○	○

Have any important life events happened to you in the last three weeks? Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

What was that event? Please write your answer here:

All things considered, how stressful was that event for you? Please choose only one of the following:

- Not at all stressful
- Somewhat stressful
- Very stressful
- Extremely stressful

APPENDIX B

CGT CODING MANUAL FOR CODING EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Coding Directives and Major Themes
Nonphysical IPV (NPIPV)

Themes related directly to the labeling of NPIPV rather than descriptions of NPIPV behaviors

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1. Explicit labeling of NPIPV (Acknowledgement of violence)

2. Labeling by proxy of NPIPV

   Discussing the context of NPIPV from the perspective of family or friends usually related to descriptors that suggest isolation. Think about too expressive writing entries that suggest hiding partner from social networks, family concern of relationship,

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Nonphysical IPV described by victim experiences

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3. Degradation

   NPIPV related to name calling, verbal insults, "saying mean things to me" Hurtful words can be described directly or alluded to by the writer. Behaviors that reflect criticizing or humiliating one's partner are also part of this theme.

4. Isolation

   NPIPV related to separation of social networks, additionally abandonment (physical or emotional) can also be coded as a kind of isolation tactic -think like silent treatment or stonewalling). Also monitoring behaviors and interactions with others.

5a. Controlling Behaviors

   NPIPV not considered part of isolation such as invasion of privacy, keeping tabs on partner, needing to know where they are at all times. Accusations of cheating without evidence of previous infidelity is also a controlling tactic.

5b. Loss of control by perpetrator

   NPIPV manipulation tactic usually signaled by an argument or break up (example: threats of harm, bargaining, threatening to kill self, destruction of property etc.)

6. Jealousy Spectrum** (if word "jealous" not explicitly stated can still code, just make a note)

   This coding works on a continuum using the word "jealous" or "jealousy" as a generalized relationship descriptor does not meet for NPIPV. Jealous behaviors must meet for more pathological IPV behaviors. Jealousy is often a predictor of victimization. The following examples from the literature are included:
   - Jealousy associated with controlling a partner's whereabouts and the suspicion of infidelity (Kyegombe, 2016).
   - Jealousy is a predictor of future IPV victimization (Nemeth et al., 2012)
   - Romantic Jealousy and fears of infidelity are related to NPIPV outcomes (Pichon et al., 2020)

Physical and/or sexual IPV behaviors

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7. Physical/Sexual IPV

   Behaviors that include using physical force against one's partner (sexually coercive behaviors that involve nonconsensual sexual activity code in this category).

Bidirectional experiences

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8. Perpetration and victimization are present within the writing prompt, particularly for NPIPV as if there is an exchange of the behaviors

   Related to the jealousy spectrum- "individuals intentionally seek to incite jealousy from their partners contributes to the experience of IPV" (Kaufman, 2015)

Gender influences on IPV

9. Victimization reports by men differ than women. Almost a minimization of aggressive behavior.

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